Technique Master the gravel **BodyBreak Rides** Hal Johnson has fun on mixed surfaces

CANADIAN Cycling MAGAZINE

Tour de FRANCE Special

THE ULTIMATE PRIMER
FOR CYCLING'S
MAIN EVENT

11 WAYS TO GO FASTER Without Training More

PLUS

The Best Gear for Your
GRAVEL ADVENTURES

How a Small Quebec
Cross Country Squad Became
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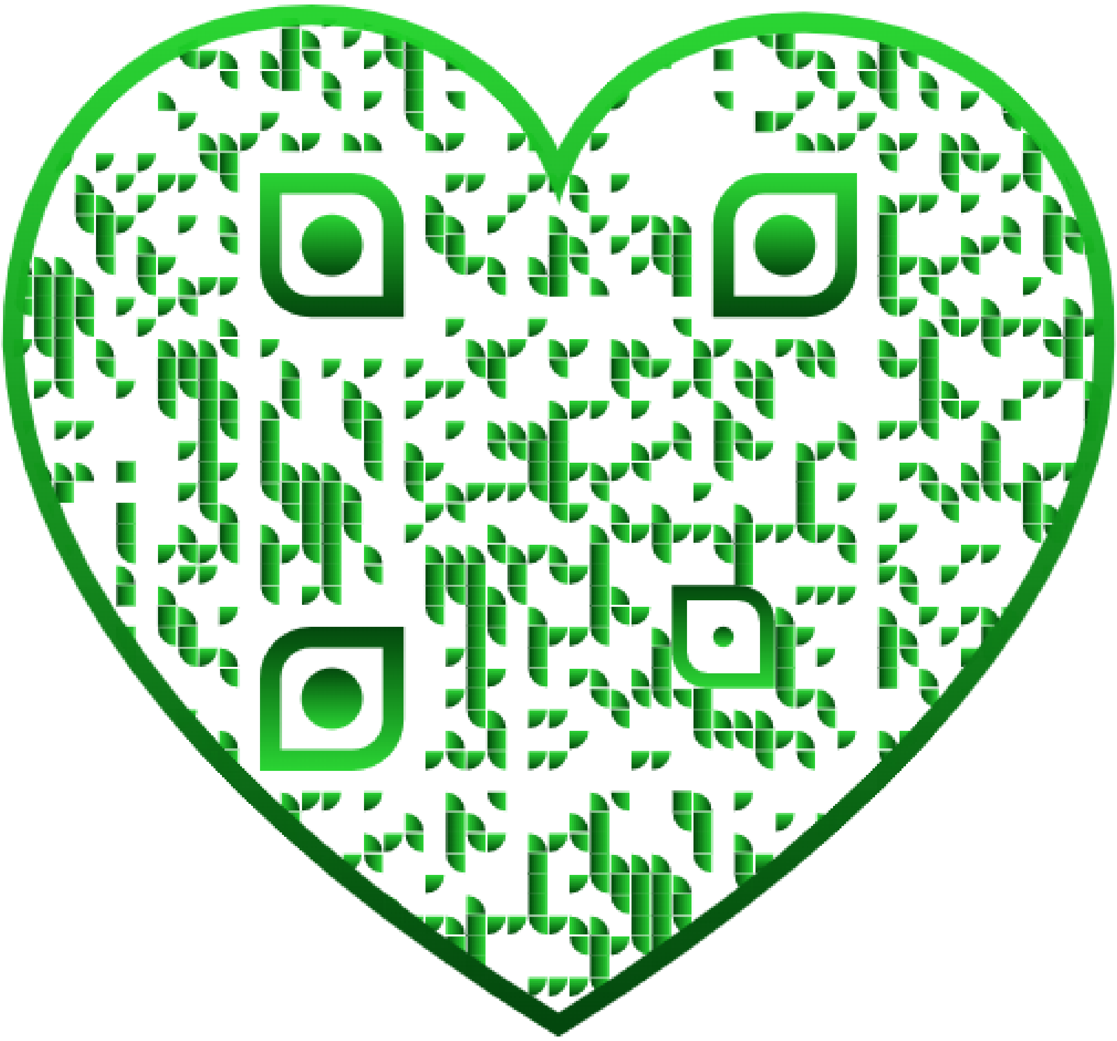

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ON THE COVER

Jayden Kuijpers rides a Scott **Addict RC 10** (*scott-sports.com*) with Shimano Ultegra Di2 drivetrain. It's a high-performance road machine. Kuijpers is outfitted in Shimano's new **Stile jersey** and **Distanza bib shorts** (*ridecanada.shimano.com*), both released this past March. The kit is designed to keep a rider like Kuijpers comfortable on long road rides. The Shimano **RC703 shoes** complement the clothes as they also blend performance and comfort. To learn more about the features of the high-end Lazer **Z1 Kineticore helmet** (*lazersport.ca*) that Kuijpers wears, head to p.63. There's a focus on his Shimano **Equinox glasses** on p.66 where you'll find out just how light they are.

Photo: Filip Funk

EDITOR'S LETTER

You Should Take Apart Your Bike More Often

The process could save you from embarrassment

The timing worked out well with mechanic Nick Di Cristofaro's story for this issue. I had actually assigned 'Travelling with Your Bike By Air,' (p.26), for my purposes, but I knew that Nick's advice about packing up a bike for a flight would help all readers headed to cool riding destinations.

You see, months ago, my colleagues and I were Sea Otter bound with our bikes as the plan was to do some riding in California before the expo. I wanted some tips for disassembling my machine to get it in its bike bag. You might ask, why would the editor of a bike magazine, who's been at his post for more than 12 years, need advice packing his bike? Well, the reason will sound a bit rich: most trips I go on feature a bike waiting for me at the other end. Usually there's some new rig to test. Other times, there's an event or destination that wants me to see what bikes they have on hand. Whatever the case, it's pretty great. It's one of the reasons I dig this job.

I also dig tinkering with bikes. So, armed with Nick's story, I got down to removing wheels and their rotors. Off came the pedals. I disconnected the rear derailleur from its hanger. I pulled out the seatpost carefully. A wire for my Shimano Dura-Ace Di2 groupset runs into the battery that sits in the post. I disconnected the wire and taped it to the seat tube. Then, off came the stem and bar, which I strapped carefully to the frame. In no time, I was zipping up the bike bag.

I know there are some of you who have already caught my mistake. If you didn't, don't worry. I'll reveal it soon in all its embarrassing glory.

When my colleagues and I got to our destination, we assembled our bikes first thing so we could get riding. For some reason, I couldn't get my electronic shifting to work. It was strange. I had put everything back in the reverse order that I had taken it off. But the derailleurs wouldn't shift. Had I busted the wire sliding it back into the seat tube? I unplugged and reconnected things I could see. Nothing. In a mix of frustration and curiosity, I started tugging on the wire that ran out the back of the frame to the rear mech. The wire kept coming and coming. So it hit me. I had only taped the front derailleur's wire to the frame. The rear derailleur's wire had fallen down into the seat tube when I first pulled out the seatpost. I didn't make the connection that it was missing.

This was all fantastically embarrassing. When this version of Dura-Ace was launched, I watched an expert mechanic from Shimano put it on my frame. I wrote about the process and reviewed the groupset. Yet, I forgot there were two wires that connected to the battery. I later told this story to a friend who works in the bike industry. He confessed to me that the same thing had happened to him, except he didn't figure out the issue and took his bike to a shop. My friend made sure to keep his industry connection a secret.

Mercifully, it didn't take me too long to fish the rear derailleur's wire through the frame. Our ride was a little delayed, but the story has a happy ending, and a lesson. Take apart your bike. You'll learn, or relearn, so much about it.

Matthew Pioro
Editor

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GALLERY

John Gibson

Riding the Bow Valley Parkway in Banff National Park

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2-1
2-2

SPARK RC

8 days, 2 world-class athletes, one bike. Cape Epic threw everything it had against Nino Schurter and Filippo Colombo - high temps, high speeds, turbulent weather and tenacious competition. Despite this, SCOTT-SRAM MTB Racing team rose to the top from the very beginning, putting their SCOTT Spark RC's through the ringer all the way to the finish line champagne shower.

The result was never in doubt. **#NoShortcuts**

©SCOTT-SPORTS.COM | MICASPORT.COM | 2025 | Photo: Nick Muzik

Nickolas Zukowsky at Tirreno-Adriatico

Maple-leaf bands working for Tom Pidcock

During Stage 6 of this year's Tirreno-Adriatico, Nickolas Zukowsky was at the front of the peloton, hauling for roughly 35 km to manage the day's breakaway and keeping things in control for his team. "We were down two riders, so only had five left in the race," Zukowsky recalled almost a month after the race. The rider from Quebec's Laurentians area was back at his home in Andorra, training at altitude for De Brabantse Pijl, the Ardennes races and later the Giro d'Italia. "With Tom Pidcock and David de la Cruz riding GC at Tirreno-Adriatico, that left three of us to control the stage, which was no easy task given the firepower up in the break. We basically controlled the race from start to finish with one other team helping us. It gave Tom a chance to fight for the stage win." Pidcock finished second on the stage to Juan Ayuso. "Our work was confirmation that we definitely belonged and could rival some of the biggest teams," Zukowsky added. That day was the highlight of the race for Zukowsky, who noted that last year he had about three months off the bike following surgery for endofibrosis in his external iliac artery in his right leg. He got back to racing late in the season.

In December, the announcement came that Pidcock would join Q36.5 Pro Cycling, the ProTeam that Zukowsky had been on since 2023. The Canadian was matched up with the Brit for his races in the early season and spring. Zukowsky's role was to help set up Pidcock to get the best results possible. "I'm enjoying it and learning a lot, racing some of the biggest races on the calendar so far this season," Zukowsky said.

It's easy to pick out Zukowsky on the road, whether that's at Tirreno-Adriatico or Milan-San Remo. Since he was the 2023 national road champion, his current jersey has maple-leaf bands on the sleeves. (He was the under-23 champ in 2019.) He has nationals on his calendar this year, so there could be a bigger maple leaf at the front of the peloton this summer.

The close-knit group of Canucks on a French ProTeam

When the four Canadian riders of Winspace Orange Seal aren't training with one another around Girona, they often get together for knitting dates. You could call Nadia Gontova from Vancouver the knitting squad's captain. "I'm definitely the one who's really pushing it. I'm sending people yarn recommendations and patterns. I think it's a really great hobby to have off the bike. It's fun, and you can socialize," she said.

Kiara Lylyk of Guelph, Ont., who Gontova said is quite a fast knitter ("She's a knitting machine. She made a sweater vest so quickly."), actually picked up needles back when she was racing at track worlds with Ariane Bonhomme this past fall in Denmark. "We were in Copenhagen, which apparently is a mecca of knitting, and we went around to all these shops. After that, I figured that I should learn. Ariane showed me how to make a hat, and then I was addicted," Lylyk said. "When I saw Naida knitting, I said, 'No way. You knit?'" The others on the France-based ProTeam—Florence Normand, of Alma, Que., and Jenaya Francis from Edmonton—are just starting out with knitting.

Because of the yarn-based hobby, Gontova looks forward to the travel required for racing carbon-fibre bikes. "Last year at the Tour de l'Ardèche, there were really long transfers. It was almost three hours to and from the race some days. I made use of that time by knitting in the car," Gontova said. "But with the European roads, I definitely need to be a little bit careful to not get car sick."

Nadia Gontova, Florence Normand, Kiara Lylyk and Jenaya Francis of Winspace Orange Seal women's team

Photos: Stefano Sirotti, Courtesy Winspace Orange Seal

Bikepacking to every race in the Life Time Grand Prix, for fitness and the environment

Early this past April, not too far from the start/finish area of the Sea Otter Classic gravel race, Alexis Cartier spoke about his big plan, which had just gotten under way. The day before, he'd raced the punchy, hilly 143-km elite men's event. Before that, the rider from Sainte-Adèle, Que.—about 90 km northwest of Montreal—flew to San Francisco, and then bikepacked to Monterey, Calif., for the first race in the six-stop Life Time Grand Prix.

"I really got smashed," Cartier said of his race performance, which wasn't much of a surprise. After all, he had spent the winter mostly fat biking, as well as riding the trainer and some cross-country skiing. There was no trip to a snow-free training camp, no preparation races for the intensity of competition. It was all part of the plan to cut out as much air and car travel as possible as he pursued his racing goals. There'd only be two plane trips during his seven-month, 14,000-km journey. He needed to take flights to get to the national gravel championships in Water Valley, Alta., in June, and then back to the U.S.

The riding to the races, as well as some threshold efforts on climbs and intervals on a bag-free bike after setting up camp would build his fitness for the upcoming events, Cartier hoped. "I think it's doable, to balance performance with transportation by bike," he said. "OK, maybe it's not the most optimal setup. But I think it's about redefining excellence. What does excellence mean in our context, which is a climate crisis? Is it still cool to win at all costs, flying around the world? We're not curing cancer. It's just bike racing after all. So, I'm trying to ask those questions. I don't have the answers, but I'm definitely asking them."—*Matthew Pioro*

Photos: Courtesy, Matt Stetson, Courtesy

WHAT'S HOT

PATENT PENDING
GLACIER TAPE
COOLING BAR TAPE
Add water, stay cool for hours

Ultra Cool Glacier bar tape

$70, *rlanctot.com*

With a bit of water—from your bidon or even the sweat from your hands—Ultra Cool Glacier bar tape activates and keeps your paws cool on hot days. There's actually a reaction going on at the surface of the tape, absorbing heat. It won't feel like you're grabbing ice cubes, but think of it as a little comfort boost for your big summer rides.

Kryptonite Diamond Standard grinder-resistant lock

$486, *kryptonitelock.com*

Kryptonite has an internal video of its new Diamond Standard lock in action. It shows a spinning angle-grinder blade essentially melting once it touches the diamond-coating layer beneath the steel layer and plastic cover. Kryptonite isn't publicizing this footage; it can't over-promise on the protection its lock can offer, but the company does give it a 10 out of 10 rating. Drawbacks? The lock is pricey, and really heavy. Get it for your ebike.

NEW YORK LOCK DIAMOND
NEW YORK LOCK
KRYPTONITE

Garmin HRM-Pro Plus heart-rate monitor

$180, *garmin.com*

Naturally, Garmin's premium heart-rate monitor comes with top features: the ability to store data, a water rating down to 50 m and heart-rate variability tracking. But it's the less-flashy characteristics that really set it apart from my old Garmin HRM-Dual. The adjustability of the strap on the HRM-Pro Plus is much better. The tool-free battery door is great—no tiny bolt heads to strip in an effort to get to a dead coin cell. With proper care, the HRM-Pro Plus will monitor your ticker for thousands of kilometres.—MP

bertrand
Fait main, Hull, Canada
Hand made, Hull, Canada

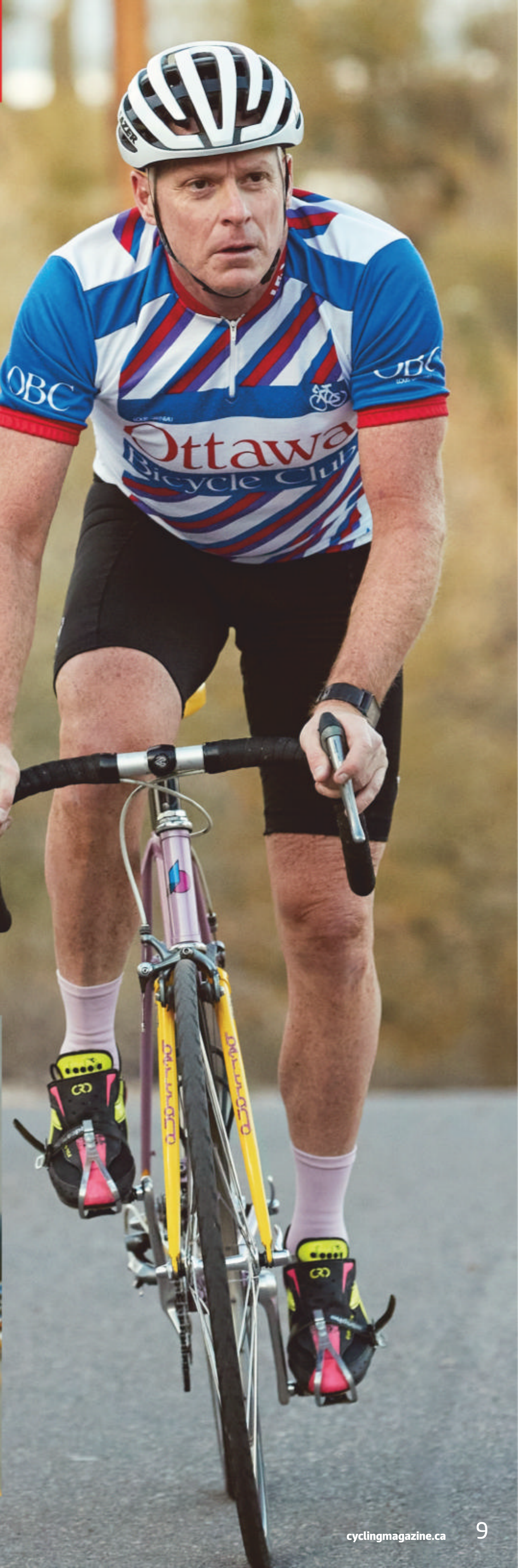
Bertrand
Custom road bike

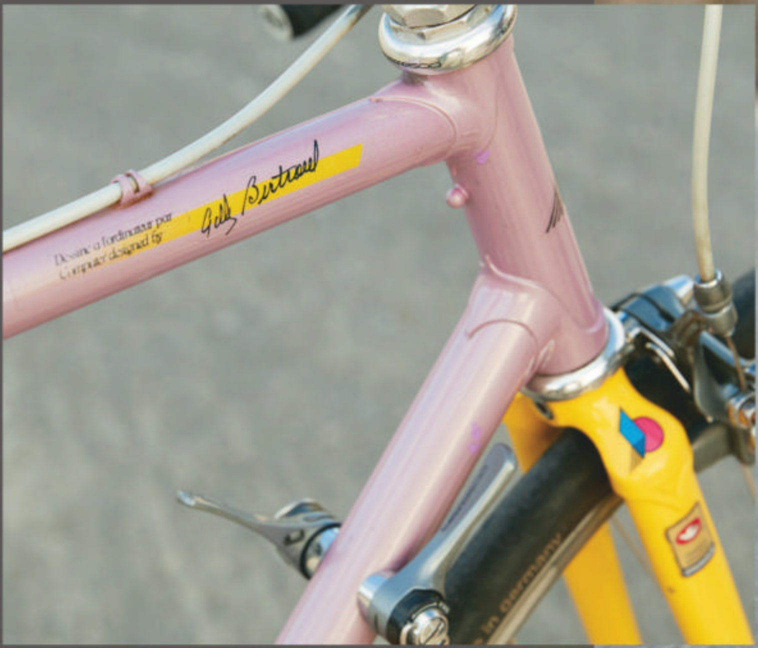
I started racing in 1983 and have an affinity with bikes of this era, yet it wasn't until I retired in 2006 that I started collecting vintage machines, searching out ones that connected with my past.

My father worked in Gatineau, Que., or Hull as it was known then, only a few blocks from the shop where Bertrand bikes were made. At the time, Gilles Bertrand's frames were a sort of alternative to Montreal's Marinoni, at least for those of us in the Ottawa area. My dad, who had one arm shorter than the other, got a custom bike with a short top tube that accommodated his limb length inequality well.

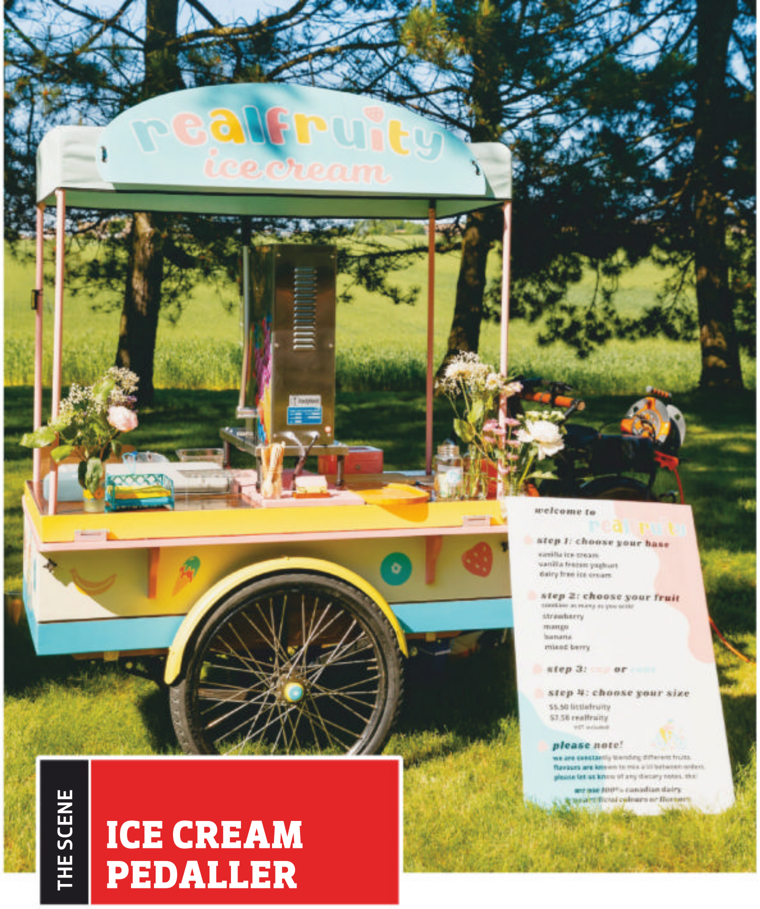
I decided to give full-time bike racing a try in 1986 with the Ottawa Bicycle Club. I upgraded my cheap Bianchi for a Bertrand that year. I went for a size 57 frame, about 1 cm too big, figuring it would cover any late teenage growth spurt, which of course, never came. But the frame still worked. I chose a distinctive yellow paint job that prompted my OBC teammates to nickname the bike Chiquita, after the company that imports bananas. I eventually sold the bike to get a newer one—the pattern back in those days—but throughout the years, I regretted that move.

My search to find a similar Bertrand took a while. It wasn't until 2023 that I found one in Montreal. At size 55, it was a touch small for me, but its yellow accents reminded me of my old frame, Chiquita, that I raced all over eastern Canada. The new-to-me bike is outfitted with a Shimano 600 groupset, the predecessor of Ultegra. In the photo, I'm wearing an OBC jersey that's period-correct and that, *ahem*, still fits.—*Gord Fraser*





Photos: Erin Korff



THE SCENE

ICE CREAM PEDALLER

Making summer treats from a custom cargo bike

by **James Bunga**

On a sun-soaked summer evening, you might expect to hear the familiar chimes of an ice cream truck rolling by. This past summer, however, in city parks and at outdoor events in Hamilton, you might have seen a bike with all the gear necessary for making the iconic treat of the season on the spot.

On a typical Wednesday evening, Jacob Koenig would load up his Realfruity bike with ice cream and frozen fruit. Then he'd then pedal from his Westdale apartment over to Churchill Park to set up. As the sun would set, he'd raise the colourful canopy and prepare the mixing machine. As the frozen fruit and vanilla ice cream would blend, the colours and flavours would swirl together, creating a tasty snack.

Koenig started Realfruity in the summer of 2024. Before that, he had quit his job and travelled through New Zealand with friends, where he became enthralled by the concept of real fruit ice cream. "We started joking about picking up one of the machines that blends the ice cream to bring home," Koenig said. Real fruit ice cream is a common snack across New Zealand. Sold at corner shops, out of carts and anywhere by a beach, it's made from hard-packed ice cream and frozen fruit, blended together to make a colourful, creamy soft serve. Looking for a new challenge, Koenig went about importing the machine he needed and building up a custom cargo bike to create a rolling real-fruit ice-cream stand.

Koenig spent the spring of 2024 converting the cargo bike and creating a freezer trailer to hold the frozen fruit and ice cream. Everything on the bike is self-sufficient and contained. With a massive battery on the back, there's no need for a gas generator. Even the waste water is collected through the bike's own plumbing system. Building the bike wasn't without its challenges, but Koenig had a lot of support. "Any hurdle that I faced, I faced with really wonderful friends and family," Koenig said. The bike was ready in time for summer. "It was June 14. I was approved that morning by public health, and then that evening, I was at the city's Art Crawl, and I sold out on my first night."

Koenig spent the rest of that summer pedalling around Hamilton serving ice cream. "At its core, it's really fun. It doesn't feel like work," Koenig said.

Koening's love of cycling goes back many years before Realfruity. "My dad got me super into mountain biking," he said. "Bikes became a huge part of my freedom." Koenig even snuck in a bikepacking trip by the North Sea in the Netherlands down to the Alps of Germany while waiting for the ice-cream mixer to arrive. "I was waiting on the machine, things were taking a little longer than I wanted, and I just couldn't sit around and wait."

Realfruity will return this summer, serving ice cream, frozen yogurt and dairy-free ice cream. Koenig also plans to expand with a second bike so Realfruity can be at even more parks and events this year. "It's more than just ice cream. It's more than just a product," Koenig said. "It's about a feeling. It's about experience and bringing people together."

> *"He even snuck in a bikepacking trip by the North Sea in the Netherlands down to the Alps of Germany while waiting for the ice-cream mixer to arrive."*

realfruity
ice cream

Photos: Steph Montani

THE SCENE

INSIDE THE DREAM JOB

Life as guide, no regrets

by **Melanie Chambers**

Johanna Weintrager has barely had anything that's resembled a fixed address since her early 20s. A van provided consistency for a time. She's been a mountain bike guide travelling the world for more than 20 years. Approaching 50, she wouldn't change a thing. Except, a garden. She'd really like to grow her own vegetables.

And while the places have been memorable—think Nepal, Peru, Brazil, Patagonia, Costa Rica and Mexico to name a few—it's the people who have touched her heart.

"When you put a person on technical terrain, they're in a vulnerable space. You see so much anger, fear, frustration and extreme joy. You can't buy this stuff. I like knowing I helped in some way," Weintrager says. She tears up recalling a man who lost an incredible amount of weight before a tour. "He was just so thankful to be able to ride his bike. There's lots of moments like that."

Raised in Ottawa, her father was an elite athlete and a huge inspiration. "He taught me to follow my dreams, and I did," she says.

In 1999, she moved out west, studied archeology and geology, then biochemistry, but they weren't her calling. From snowboarding, which she started doing in 1992, to DH racing, then coaching mountain biking and skiing, she needed to be outside. When Sacred Rides, still an employer, was looking for a female guide to lead its women's programs in 2002, downhill world champion Cindy Devine recommended Weintrager.

A guided trip usually lasts five to 14 days, but the work can keep Weintrager on the road for months. Admittedly, the travel is not conducive to relationships: "Guys would find it frustrating that I am not ready to make compromises because my work comes first," she says.

Photos: Julie Hanen/Ride The Earth, Michelle Craig

At 35, Weintrager contemplated having kids. "That didn't happen, but I have no regrets. Being able to explore new countries and cultures is amazing," she says. "Watching people grow and learn from one another is beautiful."

From the moment her cycling guiding season begins in April and until it ends in November, Weintrager is committed. "It's more than pedalling your bike. It's communicating with clients, making sure everyone is happy. It's feeding them. It's the medical side of things like injuries, illnesses, anxieties. You're always on," she says. Weintrager's seen broken backs, deep gruesome lacerations and a knocked out front tooth. Her own injuries include a broken femur, which happened in 2010.

> *"You see so much anger, fear, frustration and extreme joy. You can't buy this stuff."*

In the winter, Weintrager rock climbs and skis, but she also knows when to slow down. She's been teaching yoga since she was 24. In her 40s, she studied the discipline in India. Today, she teaches, meditates and practises asana yoga after every ride. "Yoga allows you to just be. Going to a yoga class anywhere in the world, you're surrounded by people, which can take away the loneliness."

Undoubtedly, saying goodbye is a sad reality. The first day after a tour, she sleeps; the second, she gets the blues. "You're part of this huge group that becomes your family, and then it's just you," she says. But it's temporary—blessed with a big family, she also has a huge network of friends around the globe.

One of the hardest but also most rewarding periods of her career was during the height of COVID. "It was one of the first times when I paid rent, and yet, it was a great reset," she says.

These days she guides primarily for Sacred Rides and Ride the Earth, but has recently taken up as a road bike guide for Bicycle Adventures. She also works at fly-in ski lodges and cat ski operations. Versatility is key in this occupation, not to mention, positivity.

While rock climbing in the Bugaboos in 2020, someone broke into Weintrager's storage unit stealing not only gear, but also photos and irreplaceable homemade silk dresses from Asia. It shook her. But, she worked hard on letting go. It's never been about having stuff or living a regular life. "I love what I do," she says. "I could ride my bike around the world and do it again." Ⓒ

THE SCENE

CYCLING AND THE LAW

How you can start making the streets safer

by **Dave Shellnutt**

Across the country, our bike lanes—safe infrastructure—are under attack. It seems governments are taking aim at cyclists to stoke animosity amongst road users and score political points.

Following temporary bike lanes that were a successful hit during the pandemic in Vancouver, permanent Stanley Park bike lane commitments were walked back and the car remains a fixture in this beautiful park. In Toronto, Premier Doug Ford and his team are pushing to dismantle bike lanes. In Lethbridge, bike lanes came under criticism less than six months after they opened in late 2023. Even south of the border, Donald Trump has weighed in on New York's booming bike infrastructure. All of these attacks can be daunting. It can be difficult to know what to do in response. I go from feeling powerless to empowered depending on the week.

GO SLOWLY
RESPECT OTHERS
CYCLISTS PLEASE USE ROAD
CYCLISTS PLEASE USE ROAD
CITY OF VANCOUV
Seawall CLOSED to Bicycles

> "No matter how you do it, get involved."

How does one get involved and push back? That depends on your capacity. One of my favoured approaches is a community-focused one. Support your local cycling advocacy group, such as Bike Ottawa, Halifax Cycling Coalition or Saskatoon Cycles. These organizations work at the municipal level where most decisions affecting cycling in your neck of the woods happen. I've seen community groups use data, reports and citizen engagement to advocate for change. Members attend infrastructure and budgeting meetings, as well as townhall sessions about proposed roadwork projects. They work with local elected officials and city planning staff to ensure infrastructure changes account for the safety of vulnerable road users, particularly cyclists and other mobility-device users.

But life can be busy. You might not have time to sit on the board of your local cycling group. I know for me, as a board member of Cycle Toronto and Vélo Canada Bikes, these concrete commitments can be challenging. For an alternative, look to one-off actions by advocacy groups to take part in—be it a targeted Cycle Toronto email campaign to call out engineering firms like Stantec for working to rip out bike lanes or a Vélo Canada Bikes ride to Parliament Hill to encourage federal commitment to support a national cycling strategy.

In Montreal, there is a diversity of organizations that push for change. Vélo Québec has, for more than 50 years, promoted cycling culture. Piétons Québec is a similar organization that's dedicated to the promotion of pedestrian safety. There are groups that are more likely to bring people into the streets, like the Coalition Mobilité Active Montréal. There is also an ecosystem evolving around monthly Critical Mass rides, the group that installs Ghost bikes (and now white shoes) and a growing Quebec-wide movement around school-zone safety. Much of what works so well in Montreal is mirrored in Toronto by Advocacy for Respect for Cyclists. Critical Mass rides occur in Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto and Halifax on the last Friday of each month.

While cycling clubs are usually focused on group rides and racing, many also do advocacy work. Toronto's Morning Glory Cycling Club and the Kingston Velo Club have supported ghost bike memorial rides in large numbers. Members of Saint John Cycling lobbied for Ellen's law, a one-metre passing rule that gained momentum after competitive cyclist Ellen Watters was struck by a car and later died from the injuries she sustained in December 2016. It's in the interest of all riders to work for safer conditions.

You could also look to on-bike projects, which may not be infrastructure specific, but can be a PR boost for cycling. I'm thinking of groups like Bike Brigade Halifax and Toronto that deliver food by bike from food banks to their community members in need.

Perhaps even more individually focused—though ever important as we take on well-funded political machines—is the simple act of donating money. Our cycling advocacy organizations, whether they be non-profits or char-ities, run in large measure on donations from members and concerned citizens. Cyclists provided crucial funds for Cycle Toronto's legal challenge to Premier Ford's attack on bike lanes.

No matter how you do it, get involved. It appears as though people on bikes have become easy targets for the authorities. Now more than ever, it's time to put rubber to the road and participate. Fight like our lives depend on it.

Dave Shellnutt is the founder and managing partner of The Biking Lawyer LLP, lawyers for injured cyclists, *thebikinglawyer.ca*.

Hal Johnson

The importance of bikes to the *BodyBreak* star

by **Matt Hansen**

If you're a certain age, you no doubt saw *BodyBreak* segments on TV that promoted healthy living across the county. Husband and wife duo Hal Johnson and Joanne McLeod are iconic figures in Canadian culture, known for their long-standing contributions to public health and fitness through their television appearances. There are 270 *BodyBreak* episodes in total, spanning 90-and 30-second spots, along with 39 half-hour shows and five exercise videos.

Johnson and McLeod have recently found the joy of gravel riding—but they've always known bikes as a great way to exercise. "Our first *BodyBreak* episode we ever shot in July 1988 was in a park in Toronto, and we had bikes in it," he said. "I wore the cap from *Breaking Away*, although Joanne said I should be wearing a helmet—which she did."

It would take more than 30 years for him to get into gravel and clipless pedals (and a helmet), but now he's making up for lost time on the bike.

In 2021, he began riding gravel around his home in Huntsville, Ont. The roads aren't ideal for road cycling, so he prefers mixed terrain. "I love gravel and it's a cross between road and MTB, so Joanne and I go on some pretty great adventures around here," he said.

His big move into cycling came after a knee replacement. Even before the surgery, he used the bike as a way to strengthen the muscles around his knee. "Before the knee replacement, three months out, I hired a trainer. We tried to strengthen the knee. I did a lot of indoor cycling and squats to get ready for the operation. I got hooked on cycling," he said. Nowadays, when the couple is home in Ontario, they ride their trainers in the winter—given Huntsville's snow in the cold months—usually every other day. Johnson prefers FulGaz, and McLeod uses Zwift. When the weather is warmer, they embark on their gravel adventures, often on rail trails to nearby towns, such as Bracebridge, where they'll stop for lunch before heading back.

Johnson's also dabbled in some bike races, including one of Canada's oldest gravel races, Paris to Ancaster. He decided to enter the 2024 edition after some encouragement from former pro rider Buck Miller, who lives in Johnson's area and has raced it himself a few times. Miller gave the budding racer some pointers—which Johnson said helped a lot, especially on the final climb to the finish, 500-m gravel incline up Old Martin Road, which hits 13 per cent at the top.

Johnson said he was tempted to walk at one point, but a spectator who recognized him cheered him on. "'Go Hal!' someone shouted at the side of the road, which gave me the strength to make it to the top," he recalled.

FAST FACTS
Hal Johnson

Profession	Fitness expert, television host
Lives	Huntsville, Ont.
Bikes	Giant Defy Advanced 2 road bike, Trek Checkpoint 5 gravel bike

ABOVE
Hal Johnson races the 2024 Paris to Ancaster

Photo: Finisherpix

He also said he enjoys cleaning his bike—something that took him five hours after Paris to Ancaster. "I was really meticulous about it, as there was mud and grit everywhere," he said. "So I took everything apart and made it spotless."

Although Johnson and McLeod had several big rides planned in the U.S. this summer, they've changed their plans because of the current trade war. Instead, they'll be exploring Ontario and Europe by bike. "We can't wait to get out for some long rides this summer," he said.

At 68, he still practises what he preaches. For Johnson, that's "keeping fit and having fun"—but this time, on two wheels.

PROFILE
Club Cycliste Espoirs Laval

Location	Laval, Que
Established	1968
Members	150
Online	*espoirslaval.ca*

Club Cycliste Espoirs Laval

Sparking success in young cyclists by putting passion over pressure

by **Annie Gélinas**

The impressive track record of Espoirs Laval might suggest that the youth road cycling club is focused primarily on performance. With alumni that include professional cyclists and Olympians, the organization is clearly doing something right. However, Nicolas Masbourian, director of Espoirs Laval, reveals that the club's true mission is something deeper: to introduce as many young people as possible to the world of cycling and inspire them to push beyond their limits. "Medals are great, but they're not our definition of success," Masbourian says.

Since the club's foundation in 1968, it has been committed to youth development. But while it's been historically known for its level of performance and for spotting potential, it has recently shifted its focus from competitive success to broadening access to the sport. Through organized programs and day camps, there is now a structured framework to support new recruits, with a goal of engaging 8,000 youths in 2025. "When a newcomer joins, we now have the infrastructure to welcome, coach and help them develop a long-lasting passion for cycling," Masbourian says.

This process stands in stark contrast to the club's previous strict selection methods, which operated on an "all in or all out" basis. Pushing kids to pursue goals that didn't align with their personal aspirations, however, often led to disengagement. "We returned to the essence of the sport: surpassing your limits, unlocking your potential and building self-confidence. That's what it's all about," Masbourian says.

Espoirs Laval has helped athletes such as Olympians Joëlle Numainville, Hugo Barrette and Geneviève Jeanson, to professional cyclists Matisse and Naomie Julien, currently riding for CIC-U-Nantes Atlantique and Baloise Minimax WB Ladies, respectively. So how did this new approach affect the competitive standard of the club? According to its director, a growing number of participants has broadened the pool of motivated youths at every level.

The core cycling club introduces youths seven to 16 to the sport, while the Quilicot program serves as a development track for junior athletes (under-19) and seniors (under-23). Espoirs Laval also runs two educational courses, Vélosco and Cycliste Averti, which helps kids develop essential bike handling skills and safety. "On any given day, I could be teaching a kindergarten class to ride a bike or coaching a group training for a national championship," Masbourian states with a bit of pride.

Helping each person push past their limits can take many forms, as demonstrated by the foundation of the organization's youth para-cycling program, the first of its kind in Quebec. It offers adaptive bikes and tricycles to athletes, ensuring they can enjoy the sport on their terms. With 10 active participants, the initiative's growth is a testament to the club's commitment to accessibility. "We never say no to anyone," Masbourian says. "We say yes, and then get to work finding a solution to give these kids a way to get involved in cycling."

Photos: Courtesy Espoire Laval

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THE SCENE

48 HOURS

Exploring Quebec's Véloroute du Fjord du Saguenay

Whales to look out for and serious elevation gain to challenge your legs

Photos: Courtesy Espoire Laval

by **Christina Palassio**

There's a narwhal living in the St. Lawrence River right now, around Tadoussac, Que. He's hundreds of kilometres outside his natural feeding ground, but he's found a new home with a pack of belugas—some of the more than 2,000 that now live in the area. If the narwhal and a beluga mate, their offspring would be called a narluga.

This is just one of the many absolute delights that you encounter while cycling la Véloroute du Fjord du Saguenay, a 435-km route that runs along the north and south shores of the Saguenay Fiord and by the Saguenay-St.-Lawrence Marine Park.

The fiord is a marvel. It's the only navigable fiord in North America and, at 100 km long, one of the longest in the world. It was formed 900 million years ago when travelling glaciers carved out a valley that was flooded by the St. Lawrence seawater. Thirteen types of whales, tons of krill, and ancient Greenland sharks—nicknamed living fossils by marine biologists—swim in its 240-m-deep waters.

The fiord looks tiny on a map beside the mighty St. Lawrence, but it's majestic up close, lined by 300-m cliffs. Riding the roads that run along it and the St. Lawrence River to the south is some of the best cycling you can get in Quebec, combining huge water views, spicy topography, great food, many quaint pit stops and some of the country's best whale-watching.

The Véloroute is a loop that you can start in Tadoussac—riding toward the Saguenay Region and Chicoutimi along the south side of the fiord, and then crossing over at Chicoutimi and heading back toward the St. Lawrence on the north, and less busy side—or in Chicoutimi. Much of the route is part of the province's 5,300-km Route Verte cycling network, which celebrates its 30th anniversary this year. You can ride Véloroute du Fjord in two or three big days, but I think it's best explored over four or five days. This is not an area to hurry through.

Riding the full Véloroute du Fjord will get you more than 4,500 m of climbing, but you can drop some of that elevation or add to it by mixing in the bike-friendly ferries that crisscross the fiord at different points and give riders options when route-building. If you want to extend your trip, you can tack on la Véloroute des Bleuets, which circles Lac Saint-Jean, or la Véloroute des Baleines, which runs along the north shore of the St. Lawrence toward Baie Comeau.

Part of the charm of riding around the fiord is being able to dip up and down between the main roads, built up high on those 300-m cliffs, and villages like Sainte-Rose-du-Nord and Saint-Fulgence that line the shore. It's a hell of a nice glide going down and catching glimpses of the water through the trees, and a hell of a workout climbing back out the next morning. "When I want scenery, calm, quality pavement and an easy ride, I go to the Sainte-Marguerite Valley from Sainte-Rose-du-Nord to Sacré-Coeur," says David Lecointre, the general manager of the Véloroute des Bleuets, who has been riding the Véloroute du Fjord for the past 15 years. "When I want a hard ride, I go from La Baie to Saint-Félix-d'Otis to Rivière Eternité. It's a local road with

LA ROUTE VERTE
8
VÉLOROUTE DES BALEINES

Photos: Christina Palasso, Courtesy Espoire Laval

"It's a hell of a nice glide going down and catching glimpses of the water through the trees, and a hell of a workout climbing back out the next morning."

little traffic and a lot of good climbing."

Lecointre remembers the first time he rode the route. It was with Pierre Lavoie, a local triathlete and public figure who established the Cols du Fjord ride and the Grand Défi Pierre Lavoie, which has raised millions for research on rare hereditary diseases. Hitting the area around La Baie, Lecointre remembers looking down at his heart monitor and seeing it hit 172. Lavoie's read 127. Lecointre has ridden the route more than 20 times since then and he still loves the challenge.

My first time riding in the area, I biked the north side of the fiord from the St. Lawrence up the 172 to Alma and around Lac Saint-Jean on la Véloroute des Bleuets, as part of a longer bike trip. Like many places in Quebec, the riding is tough but the living is easy. The cycling infrastructure is good: a lot of the route is on roads with 1.5-m-wide shoulders that are well-paved, well-maintained and well-marked. There are a lot of places to eat and stay, and many are designated "Bienvenue Cyclistes," Quebec's bike-friendly-business designation.

The highlights on that first trip, like on every trip, were the small things: racing down a steep hill to the waterfront in Sainte-Rose-du-Nord with a baguette, some cheese and hothouse tomatoes strapped to my panniers and eating them watching the sun set on the fiord, watching for whale spray from the campsite in Grandes-Bergeronnes with some touring cyclists from France, fiord-spotting through the trees high up on the 172.

My second time there, I explored the south side of the fiord, admiring the winding road into the Parc National du Fjord du Saguenay and biking around L'Anse-Saint-Jean with Graham Park, the owner of Velo Fjord, an ebike rental spot. It was a treat to explore the rural roads and trails around L'Anse and picturesque Saint-Félix-d'Otis. Like many towns and cities in the area, these are embracing cycle tourism and the dollars and visibility it brings.

"More and more medium- and small-sized cities understand the role that active transportation can play. More and more are interested in creating opportunities for cycling and the quality of infrastructure has improved," says

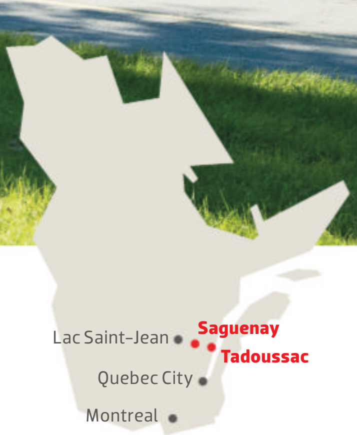
Photos: Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean/Bonjour Quebec

Jean-François Rheault, president and general manager of Vélo Québec, the province's cycling advocacy organization. In fact, the Route Verte is planning to expand its route options in three new parts of the province in 2025: Gaspé, Charlevoix and la Côte Nord.

However you tackle the route, plan a stop in Tadoussac to visit the Group for Research and Education on Marine Mammals (GREMM) to learn about the incredible whale population that feeds in the St. Lawrence and the GREMM's remarkable conservation efforts. You can even put on an orange survival suit and join a boatload of Cheetos on a whale-watching tour in the hopes of seeing a humpback, blue, minke or beluga.

The thermocline in the St. Lawrence is a hot water and cold water current that sit on top of each other and move in opposite directions, creating a breeding ground for the krill that whales scarf by the ton every day. Gen Xers in Quebec remember adopting belugas in primary school to promote conservation of the mammal that cod fishermen once thought was decimating fish stocks. The whales were hunted and even bombed by air.

The beluga population has rebounded since the 1980s and is in a healthier place. Learning about the whales, their ecosystem and the push to expand the Saguenay-St-Lawrence Marine Park is an essential stop, and will deepen your appreciation of this unique and bewitching place. And who knows, you might even spot a narluga.



Details

When to go

The weather is most bike-friendly in July to September, though you can catch some warm spells in June and early October some years.

How to get there

The closest major airport is in Quebec City. From there, it's a three-hour drive to Tadoussac or a two-hour drive to Chicoutimi. Saguenay Aventures offers a luggage service, as do the ferries.

Where to stay

You'll find hotels, motels, B&Bs and campsites in most towns and cities. Here are some options for camping and hotels: La-Descente-des-Femmes camping in Sainte-Rose-du-Nord (*campingsaguenay.com*), Camping Paradis Marin in Grandes-Bergeronnes (*campingparadismarin.com*), Hotel Tadoussac in Tadoussac (*hoteltadoussac.com*) and Auberge des 21 in La Baie (*aubergedes21.ca*)

Where to eat and drink

There's no shortage of terrific eating and drinking options in Tadoussac, including Chasse-Gardée Brewery (*chassegardee.ca*) and Bistro Chez Mathilde (*chezmathildebistro.com*). You'll find great spots along the whole route, including Bistro de la Chasse-Pinte in L'Anse-Saint-Jean (*chasse-pinte.com*).

What to do off the bike

Check out treetop trekking at Cap Jaseux (*capjaseux.com*) and via ferrata in Parc National du Fjord du Saguenay (*sepaq.com*). Kayak the fiord in L'Anse-Saint-Jean (*fjordenkayak.ca*). Go on a whale-watching tour in Tadoussac with Croisières AML (*croisieresaml.com*).

Make Your Own Gels

Homemade fuel for riding better

by **Matthew Kadey**

Throughout the past several years, the volume of sports nutrition products marketed to athletes has mushroomed. You can now power your big rides with all sorts of drinks and edibles in every imaginable flavour profile. A popular product in this category is the gel, essentially a super concentrated source of fast-working carbs in a small package. It's the energy gel that many cyclists turn to when they require a carb boost, pronto. Bacon, sadly, won't cut it.

The contents of gels vary between manufacturers, but generally speaking, they contain quick-digesting simple carbohydrates like maltodextrin or dextrose for energy (your body's preferred source of fuel during higher-intensity endurance exercise), sodium to help you offset what's lost during exercise and perhaps some caffeine for a little extra jolt. Simple to consume, easily digested, and increasingly tasty. Research shows gels are indeed effective for improving exercise performance by helping to maintain higher blood sugar levels, which increases the amount of this energy source your working muscles can burn. I, for one, never leave the house without gel stashed in my jersey pocket.

Despite the advantages of gels, not everyone is smitten with their texture, their ultra-processed ingredients that include highly refined sugars and often lab-created flavours, or their price tag. The stuff ain't cheap. So, you should know that if you can spare a bit of time you can craft your own effective, and cost-conscious, energy shots easily in the comfort of your kitchen using nothing more than a few simple ingredients—something that will appeal to people looking for an *au naturel* approach to fuelling any big effort.

Here's the formula I use for making my own fruity blast of energy.

> *"If you can spare a bit of time, you can craft your own effective, and cost-conscious, energy shots easily in the comfort of your kitchen using nothing more than a few simple ingredients"*

Dried Fruit

Raisins, dates and even apples—dried fruits are a concentrated source of sugars, both naturally occurring and perhaps what is added to certain ones like cranberries, to help power your working muscles. Variations occur, but overall, dried fruit is a mixture of sucrose (a disaccharide, or double sugar, composed of glucose and fructose), glucose and fructose. The benefit of this carb mixture is that it will utilize different transport mechanisms and thus increase intestinal absorption capacity to allow for greater burn rates and a lower risk for digestive woes. As a general rule, you want to use ⅓ cup of dried fruit for each gel serving, which should give you a minimum of 30 g of carbs just from the fruit.

Sweetener

For added carb calories and to offset the tartness of certain dried fruit, it's possible to include sweeteners such as granulated sugar, honey, maple syrup or date syrup in your homemade energy shots.

Salt

Since dried fruit is very low in sodium, you'll want to add a touch of salt to your concoction. The salt is here to help replace some of what you are losing in sweat, improve taste and also stimulate thirst, which encourages you to drink more and, in turn, maintain better hydration. I advise using ⅛ teaspoon of fine grain salt for each gel serving. This amount equals roughly 300 mg of sodium, with sodium losses during exercise generally ranging from 500 to 1,300 mg/l each hour. You don't need to replace all of the sodium you are losing during a ride.

Water

You'll soak the dried fruit in hot water to soften it before blending. The perk of these gel-like fruity carb bombs is that they have built-in extra water to aid with absorption and hydration, and to help limit the digestive pitfalls that can come with sucking back too many lower moisture packaged gels.

Flavour Boosters

I use citrus zest, cinnamon, vanilla and even cocoa powder to add an extra layer of flavour to DIY gels. Remember, the gel must be something you actually want to eat to fuel yourself effectively during your efforts. An unused gel is energy wasted.

Vessel

Of course, you are going to need something to transport your gels in, and a resealable plastic bag is not going to cut it. You can purchase dedicated gel flasks, both hard and soft shells. Another good option would be the reusable screw-cap baby food pouches you can find online. I've also heard of people using mini refillable shampoo bottles for travelling that you can pick up at dollar stores. An important benefit here is that you can cut down on the plastic waste that occurs with using one-and-done store-bought gels.

Matthew Kadey is a registered dietician and the designer of Ontario's BT 700 bikepacking route.

Recipes

Here is a trio of homemade energy gels to help power your big rides. For each, place dried fruit and boiled water in a blender container and let soak for 30 minutes. Add remaining ingredients and then blend until mixture is as smooth as possible. The recipes each make enough to fill two gel flasks, which is two servings. You can top with extra water if room remains in the flasks. The energy shots can be made a few days in advance if kept chilled.

PB&J

⅔ cup dried cherries
1 ½ cups boiled water
2 tbsp peanut butter powder
2 tbsp honey
¼ tsp salt

Maple Raisin

⅔ cup raisins
1 ½ cups boiled water
2 tbsp maple syrup
½ tsp vanilla
½ tsp cinnamon
¼ tsp salt

Orange Cranny

⅔ cup dried cranberries
1 ½ cups boiled water
2 tbsp brown sugar
1 tsp orange zest
½ tsp ginger powder
¼ tsp salt

Gravel Riding Skills You Can Master

TRAINING

TRAINING TIPS

Boost your mixed-surface handling so you can rip and slip with confidence

by **Peter Glassford**

When I coach athletes to ride and race better on their gravel bikes, I focus on three facets of a gravel events they'll have to face. Bumpy terrain, variable-surface corners and technical climbs are undeniably part of a good event. They also require specific skills. While your indoor riding and road cycling will boost your fitness, it is important to spend time mastering the skills required for these three features so you can thrive in your gravel rides and races.

Cruising along bumpy terrain

In a recent gravel race I took on, there was pack riding, river crossings, sand pits, a descent strewn with baby-head rocks, bumpy rail trail and an unexpected snow storm. The range of surfaces and conditions you will see in gravel rides and races is wide and handling those conditions requires the right equipment and great skills.

A key piece of equipment is your tires. With tires, I suggest you focus more on their traction, suspension qualities and flat-resistence instead of weight and rolling resistance. If you struggle with control, comfort or crashes, then you might try a bigger tire and/or lower pressures. Keep a close watch on that pressure. If the tire is bottoming out or feels sloppy, put some air back in. Using a digital pressure gauge to set your tires every time you head out is a great way to ride with confidence once you know what works for you.

After your tires are dialed, practise switching your hands between the hoods, drops and tops of your handlebars. If you can use each of these positions, you have more options to maintain balance and control—plus a way to minimize fatigue and blisters.

On flatter, bumpy sections, try adopting a looser grip on either the drops or the tops to gain control and comfort. On descents and many technical sections, it is best to use the drops for the most control. If you struggle to reach the brake levers from the hooks, loosen your grip slightly and adopt a more "elbows out" posture to help the index fingers reach the brake levers. This posture also moves you to a wide and low position that will boost balance and control.

Hone your braking. As with a driver's education class, start slowly in a controlled environment and progress so that eventually you are ready for emergency stops on open roads and cliff-side trails. The goal is to be confident in stopping abruptly anytime and anywhere, while also getting your foot unclipped and to the ground.

Start in a grassy field. Work on stopping and putting your foot down. Then see if you can do it with the other foot. As you get more comfortable, progress to higher speed stops on downhills and loose surfaces. Make it more realistic by having a friend yell "stop" randomly as you ride around a loop.

To stop quickly and find extra traction try "digging in your heels" while you brake. Essentially, you drop your heels lower than your pedals and add more pressure as you brake harder. The correct ready position lets you absorb more of the braking forces.

Cornering on loose surfaces

Cornering on gravel differs significantly from road and mountain biking because of the high speeds combined with variable terrain. With experience, you will develop the ability to anticipate the level of grip the surface is likely to offer. In general, if you notice loose gravel on top of a firm surface or a transition between pavement and gravel, then you will want to be extra cautious with how much traction you ask for from your tires. Braking, accelerating, turning or leaning all demand traction. If you lean really far and brake hard, you'll skid. If you do that on purpose, you can skid stylishly. If it's unintentional, you could have a painful wash-out.

To avoid sliding, use your brakes to control speed before you start to lean. When you do tilt the bike, you're relying on your traction more for cornering than braking. You should learn how to skid on purpose and with style. It's for more than flipping rooster tails. It's a good way to understand controlled braking and cornering, and to learn to correct a slide or skid during a corner. To build your skidding skills, set up a short cyclocross or gravel-crit style course in your local park. Work on skids at different speeds, fatigue and exertion levels.

Conquering off-road climbs

Fitness is a big factor in climbing success. But being able to stand on your pedals efficiently, perform a track stand and hop on the spot with your brakes locked are skills that will really help your off-road ascending. You can develop them relatively quickly and safely.

When a hill gets challenging due to grade or surface, you will need to be comfortable out of the saddle, moving your body around to get traction and to help the bike over obstacles. As kids, we might have challenged friends to see who could make it up a climb, and that is still a great idea as an adult. Steep and technical climbs not only make for excellent intervals and workouts, but they will help you perform the skills and precise movements while you're tired and working hard. Those conditions will prepare you well for the steep or technical

> *"If you do that on purpose, you can skid stylishly. If it's unintentional, you could have a painful wash-out."*

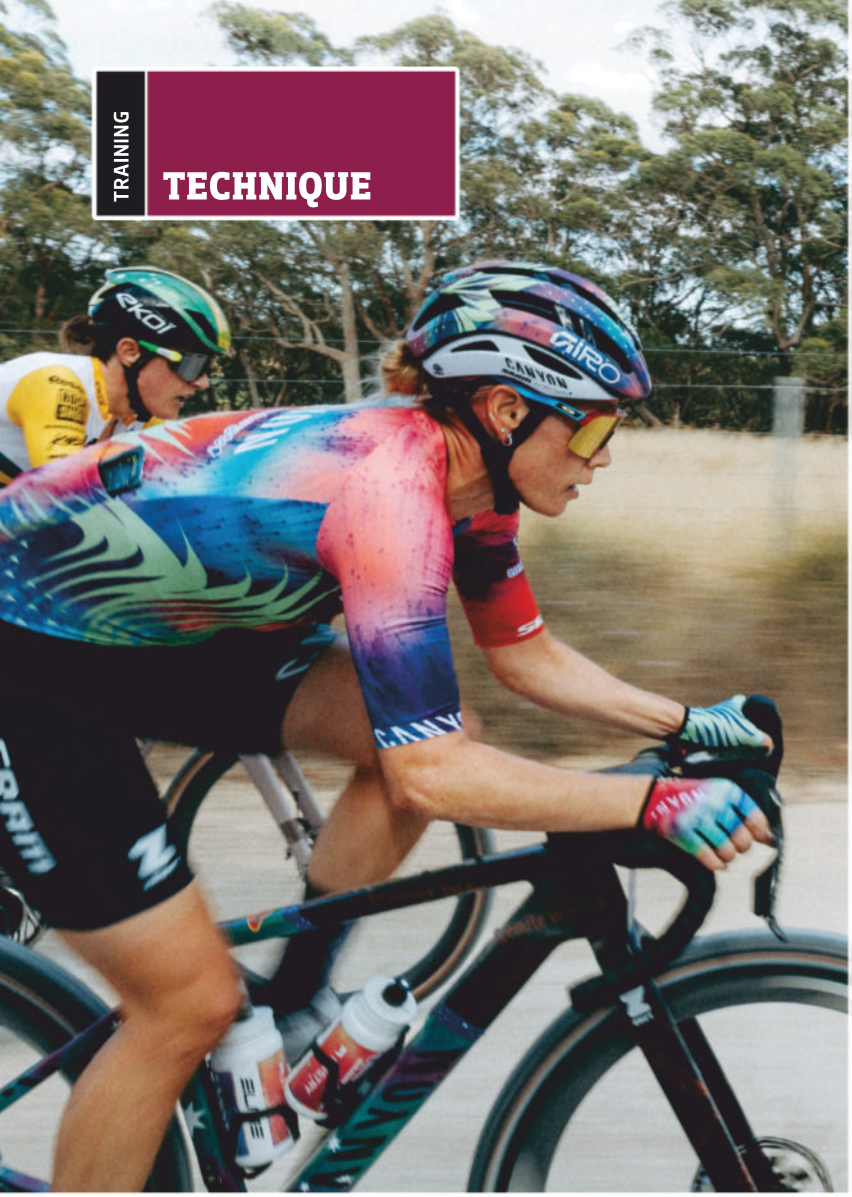
climbs on your next gravel adventure. Standing and pedalling for five-minute chunks without sitting down is another childhood-era challenge that will help you develop out-of-the-saddle efficiency.

Slow speed skills such as track stands, hopping, and starting and stopping are limiters for many cyclists. In off-road cycling, you often need to unclip, stop and start in less-than-ideal spots. Work on your ability to get going on a climb that is loose and technical. That way, you can take advantage of a chance to remount or get started quickly after slipping out.

Build up so you can do long track stands and hop on the spot with your brakes locked. These two skills will help you maintain balance on steep, slow and technical climbs. They also involve so many elements of other skills that you will find that the rest of your cycling gets better the more you stand and hop.

If you prepare for bumpy terrain, cornering on loose surfaces and challenging climbs, you'll enhance your preparedness and enjoyment of gravel rides and events significantly. Remember to integrate skill practice into your training routine, alongside your endurance rides and interval sessions by choosing routes that exaggerate the situations you are preparing for. Then, you ensure you get enough practice and challenge your skills continuously.

Peter Glassford is a registered kinesiologist and coach at *consummateathlete.com*.



LEFT
Tiffany Cromwell races RADL GRVL

Tiffany Cromwell on Mixing Road and Gravel Racing

Tips from the pro on racing across both smooth and rough surfaces

by **Steve Thomas**

Top road pro and leading gravel racer, Australian Canyon/SRAM Zondacrypto rider Tiffany Cromwell is a long-standing legend with her ability to blend disciplines. Here, in her words, she explains what she has learned and how she goes about mixing her own cocktail of hard stuff and grit.

Using different tools

Gravel bikes for racing are becoming closer in geometry to road bikes: a bit more aggressive. Ultimately, you need something that's comfortable and fits you. You need to be able to handle the bike across long distances.

A main consideration is tire width and clearance. If it's really rocky, muddy or technical, then you're looking at tires greater than 40 mm in width, even as wide as 50 mm. On road, you rarely go wider than 30 mm. Even in Paris-Roubaix, it's in the range of 32 to 34 mm in full slicks. With gravel, you have a lot more choice. You can switch depending on terrain.

Getting the right tire pressure is important, as is using the right sealant in a tubeless setup and learning how to plug tires. You need to learn all of these skills, which come with practice and experience.

Preparation and game plans

On the road, I'm racing more in support of the team. On gravel, I'm aiming to win, but with no teammates, I race a bit more conservatively. The important moves are often made early in the race. Groups get established toward the beginning. Then, you're looking at how to make your move from there.

Race strategies continue to develop in gravel. It's only been a few years for women's-only starts. It used to be last-one standing: you start with the men and hang on for as long as you can. But that is changing.

I do recons of the important sections, particularly if the event has a technical finish. I then work out what I need to approach it. Still, you have to be willing to go to your limit at the start, find your legs, and reset and worry about the rest of the race after that.

Fast riding and slow food

You have to have enough nutrition. In North America, there are races six hours and longer, with Unbound being 10 to 12 hours. Those distances require a lot of fuel. You also have to train your gut to be able to handle that much nutrition. For me, a mix of gels and regular food work best, as six to seven hours of only gels gets a bit much. With drinks, I start with a water pack on my back. If there's a drop station somewhere, then I know I can get rid of that and just use the bottles on my bike, which saves weight, too.

In some gravel races, you have support. In others, you're self-sufficient. You have to work out how much you want to carry. If you stop to refuel, you risk losing your group. In such cases, hydration vests are helpful.

Mixed advice

The biggest challenge for me is balancing schedules and the races I want to do. Then, I factor in travel. Are there a couple of races I can do in the area? Can I add in some altitude perhaps?

If you swap week to week from road to gravel, it's a bit trickier as the efforts are different. Gravel races can sometimes take longer to recover from (as does a long stage race). I tend to look at things in blocks—road blocks for important races and separate gravel blocks.

Outside of the structuring, it's pretty easy to run road and gravel side by side, but ultimately, you need to find out what works for you.

Photo: Christopher Morrison

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TRAINING

MAINTENANCE

Travelling with Your Bike by Air

Tips for packing your rig for a far-off riding destination

by **Nick Di Cristofaro**

One of the great things about the bicycle is that it lets you explore in a way that's better than most other vehicles. You can see things and travel around with a bike at a much better pace than in a car and also go where a four-wheel vehicle can't. The bike is a great way to try routes close to home and farther afield. Yet, to get to new locations, you may want to put your bike on an aircraft. Here are some tips based on my experiences to help you

> *"I pack my shoes, pedals, helmet and one set of kit in my carry-on. If my bike is delayed (or worse!), I can still rent a bike and not miss the opportunity to ride in a new location."*

9 Key Tips for Packing Your Bike

1. If your wheels use quick-releases, remove them after you take off the wheels and pack the skewers carefully. If you have disc brakes, remove the rotors so they don't get bent in transit. Enclose the rotors in bubble wrap or DIY cardboard sleeves. Don't forget to pack the tool for reattaching the rotors. Place pad spacers in the calipers between the brake pads to prevent them from closing on themselves.
2. If you have to remove your handlebars, it is best to leave them attached to your stem and take the stem off the steering tube. This way, you don't have to mark the handlebar's position or fiddle with centring it again. At the steering tube where the stem sat, place a cable tie to keep the headset together. You can also get a cardboard tube from a bike shop, and then bolt the top cap on top of it with all your spacers to keep the fork together.
3. At your hardware store, buy various sizes of pipe insulation. This round foam wraps around parts of your frame easily for extra protection.
4. Even if the case manufacturer says you can leave your rear derailleur in place, I would still recommend removing it from the hanger. Wrap the mech up with bubble wrap and tuck it under the chainstays. Use a piece of that pipe insulation foam to wrap the derailleur hanger as well.
5. Remove the air from your tires. Airlines require this step. If you are running a tubeless setup, remove enough air so the tires are soft but not totally deflated to keep the beads from being popped and leaking sealant.
6. If you have electronic shifting, remove any batteries if possible. If you can't take them off, unplug them to avoid draining them if a shift button is pressed in transit.
7. You can fill the extra spaces in your case with clothing and kit items. Place clothes in plastic bags to protect them from grease. The kit prevents things from moving around, clears up room in your other luggage bag and also adds a bit of extra padding.
8. Add padding/bubble wrap anywhere in your case where two items touch each other. Take a picture of your packing job for future reference. You can also use this image for submitting a claim should something go missing.
9. I pack my shoes, pedals, helmet and one set of kit in my carry-on. If my bike is delayed (or worse!), I can still rent a bike and not miss the opportunity to ride in a new location.

get your bike to its destination safely.

For the trip, you'll need a bike-specific travel case. Some models have a hard outer shell, while others are soft. A hard case will offer better protection from outside forces, but is generally heavier and more cumbersome. A soft case is lighter and can be packed away more easily when not in use, but requires more work to pad your bike and its parts. A soft outer shell simply offers less protection. Damage can occur when you use a hard case, too. Nothing, unfortunately, is foolproof.

To pack your bike, you'll have to remove its wheels. Most often, the pedals have to come off, too. Many bags require that you take off the handlebars and seatpost. If you have large handlebars or an integrated cockpit that doesn't come off the steering tube easily, you'll need a case that can accommodate them.

Once you've decided on the right travel case—hard or soft, bars on or off—check the manufacturer's instructions or instructional videos on how to best back your bike in the case. Then, take a run through my nine tips and my detailed list of what to bring on your trip. With all that information at hand, your bike will have an enjoyable flight and you'll have the best odds of a hassle-free cycling trip.

Nick Di Cristofaro is a veteran bike mechanic and the service manager at Forza Performance.

What to Bring

Take note of all the **tools you needed for disassembly** and bring those tools with you. Think about how you'll reattach the pedals, rotors, seatpost, stem and handlebars.

Bring disposable gloves, chain lube and a few rags for wiping and **cleaning**. Pack your tools with the rags in a resealable plastic bag.

It is a good idea to bring some **carbon paste** to re-apply if you remove your seatpost or handlebars.

Pack a **bike pump** to inflate your tires. Bring your CO_2 inflator but do not pack CO_2 cartridges. They are not allowed on any airline. Once you get to your destination, you can visit a shop and buy a couple.

An essential spare part is a **rear derailleur hanger**. Unless you have a new universal derailleur hanger frame, you have a derailleur hanger specific to your bike. It is time-consuming and almost impossible to find the right hanger when you are on the go.

Bring **tubes** and/or a tubeless repair kit and **sealant**. A spare **tire** will also give you some piece of mind.

I'd pack a **quick-link** for my specific chain and a tool to install/remove it. A **chain breaker** tool and even a spare chain are good to have.

Don't forget the **charger** for your electronic shifting system and bike computer.

If you have a proprietary spoke design for your wheels, bring some **spare spokes**.

Extra **insurance** can be a useful tool should something terrible happen to your bike in transit. It's worth looking into.

11 Ways to **Improve** on the Bike **Without Training** More

You don't need to cram in more workouts. By improving technique, fuelling and even breathing, you'll see performance gains that will have you riding better in no time

by **Molly Hurford**

You're riding a lot, maybe even following a training plan—but you're feeling a little stuck. While training is a major piece of the "getting faster" puzzle, you may be leaving some efficiencies on the table. Here, experts in different areas reveal how to gain watts by making minor tweaks to position, fuelling, strength, temperature tolerance and even the way you breathe—no additional training hours required. In fact, some of the best advice centres on knowing when to pull back on training in favour of shifting your focus to something even more effective.

1

Ride from a position of power

There are two ways to approach bike fit. You can go for a fit that, on paper, is the most aerodynamic and "fast," essentially fitting your body to the bike. Then there's the one that fits the bike to your body. Human Powered Health's lead bike fitter Willie Swift is quick to tell riders that the first option might seem speedy at first, but it's not going to make you faster in the long run. "For 99 per cent of riders, the best position, both for efficiency and performance, is the position you can hold for the majority of a ride," says the fitter on the women's WorldTeam.

"Saddle position is incredibly important for determining efficiency and how much power you can produce," Swift says. "Think about how you are engaging your muscles and which muscles you are engaging primarily. If you're too far forward on the bike, you're most likely loading your quads disproportionately in comparison to your glutes, your hamstrings and your calves, and that's costing you efficiency."

You may need a new fit if, as Swift puts it, "you feel like you're getting gassed sooner than you should on rides, or you feel like you're not getting as much out of this bike as you could." Finding the balance between a more aero position and the position that best works with the body you currently inhabit is the bike fit sweet spot you should aim for.

Unless you're racing ultra-short time trials, comfort should always trump efficiency. The most aerodynamic bike fit only works if you're comfortable in that position. "Discomfort isn't efficient," says Swift.

2

Swap in strength

Rather than adding more workouts or mileage, invest your time in two short strength-training sessions each week—and target your whole body, not just your quads and calves. "The main job of the upper body and core while you're cycling is to withstand the forces that you're putting out through your legs," Swift says. "If you're not able to be solid in your upper body and you're gripping the handlebar really tightly, you're wasting a bunch of energy

to hold yourself in the position."

It doesn't take much strength training to make you a more efficient rider. Karen Duff, mountain biker and personal training specialist at Fit4Adventure, is a fan of adding in short high-intensity strength sessions that combine bike-specific movements with core and upper body work. Two 30-minute sessions weekly can make a big difference.

"In my classes, I'm mixing strength movements like a dumbbell-weighted squat with a press-up into a reverse lunge with high-intensity movements like burpees to keep the heart rate up so you're getting some strength, but also a bonus cardio workout," she explains. "It's great because you don't need much equipment: a mat and a few dumbbells and you're able to get to work."

Her favourite strength movements for cyclists include pedal stance work—standing with one foot forward, the other foot back, like you're standing up on your pedals. "We'll do flies, rows and deadlifts in this position to work on cycling-specific glute activation," she says. (It also makes training the upper body feel more cycling-specific.)

5

Train for the heat, in the heat

Heat training is, well, hot right now. Is it worth it? It may not be a pleasant training stimulus, but if you have a hot race coming up, Dr. Stephen Cheung, a professor at

Brock University and head of the Environmental Ergonomics Laboratory, says it's worth pursuing.

"Heat adaptation generally increases plasma volume, lowers resting heart rate and core temperature and increases sweating rate," he explains. "If you are preparing for hot summer events, you might as well adapt and gain potential benefits, then maintain these adaptations throughout the season."

Luckily, you don't need to change up your training much in order to add heat. Cheung recommends daily training of 60 to 90 minutes in hot conditions, potentially adding a sauna or hot bath immediately afterwards. It doesn't need to be fancy—just bundle up. "This can be done on the bike with lots of clothing, on the trainer with clothing and minimal fans," he says. "Heat is heat is heat. The sole point is to raise your body temperature and then keep it raised."

4

Learn to breathe

As you ride, you likely noticed times when you are gasping for air—but have you ever thought of your lungs like a trainable muscle? Luke Way, endurance coach and founder of the Isocapnic Respiratory Training System, says that

> "If your upper body isn't solid and you're gripping the handlebar really tightly, you're wasting a bunch of energy to hold yourself in the position."

our breathing is something we can train—and by doing so, we can become more efficient riders. "Even riding at an endurance pace, our breathing muscles alone take up around 12 to 14 per cent of total energy expenditure," he says. "Breathing is incredibly energy intensive and important to performance. And there is so much room for improvement."

"We've seen that 70 per cent of the athletes we've tested are limited by their ability to breathe, and benefit from doing some respiratory muscle training," he adds. "Your lungs are like muscles. They need training and conditioning, just like your biceps or quads."

Test your breathing with the body oxygen level test protocol. While sitting comfortably, time how long you can comfortably hold your breath after exhaling. Thirty seconds is good, 40 seconds is superior. The good news is that you can train your breath by practising this protocol. Simply do the test two to three times a day. Way says you'll likely see improvements in your body's ability to tolerate CO2 quickly.

You can also take it up a notch with Isocapnic's respiratory trainer, which allows you to train your lungs like any other muscle by keeping the respiratory system in balance by controlling CO2 levels. Way recommends breath training as part of your pre-workout warm-up routine, but you can also use a device like Isocapnic's while scrolling your phone, checking emails or meditating.

5

Pedal smoothly to go faster

"If your pedal stroke is choppy or not consistent throughout each stroke, if you're not applying power to the pedals smoothly, you're going to waste a lot of energy," Swift says. "It can also be sporadic. Often when people try to speed up, they hit these huge wattage spikes as they try to maintain the same cadence, and that blows up their muscles for no reason. Developing the ability to increase your power smoothly is great for efficiency and for burning fewer matches."

The best way to get better at pedalling well is simply to become more mindful of your pedal stroke. "Putting a little reminder to yourself that 'smooth is fast' on your head tube can be a good way to keep your pedal stroke top of mind," Swift says. He also adds that you should keep an eye on your power meter anytime you try to increase speed or change cadence. Can you speed up without abruptly changing your power? "Any change in power or effort shouldn't be felt in one singular pedal stroke," Swift says. "It's something that has to be done gradually over the course of a bunch of pedal strokes."

Of course, there are times when you'll need to hammer on the pedals: if someone attacks and you need to counter it in a race. Yet, even in the case of a sprint finish, ideally, you would ramp up smoothly, not smashing through your gears and risking a chain drop.

6

Match fuelling to output

"Cyclists rarely consider how their power meter data and in-ride calorie-burn information relates to what they're eating on the bike," registered dietitian and author of *Practical Fueling for Endurance Athletes*, Kylee Van Horn, explains. "But actually looking at your specific energy expenditure and working to replace a percentage of those

FACTOR
FACTOR

calories can make you much more effective as a cyclist."

Van Horn recommends aiming to replace 50 per cent of calories expended hourly. This number will change depending on the work that you're doing. A Zone 2 ride will have a different caloric cost compared with an interval session. How do you keep track of your calorie expenditure? Most cycling computers allow you to add a calories-burned data field to their screens.

7

Learn to ride at different cadences

To be efficient on the bike, you need to be able to adapt to different situations, which means having a broad range of cadences that feel comfortable to you. Most new riders naturally default to lower cadences, which are more muscular. While turning a bigger gear is great for climbing a steep hill, it's not ideal when you're trying to speed up out of a corner or to catch back up to the group.

"Depending on the power that you're putting out and depending on the watts per kilo you're putting out, there are different ideal cadences for efficiency," Swift says. "Riding in Zone 2, research has shown that pretty slow rotations per minute (r.p.m.)— 60 to 70 r.p.m.—are actually more efficient. But as you increase your power, you're not firing your muscles at the speed at which they're the strongest at that slow cadence. Beyond Zone 2, 85 r.p.m. is considered the most efficient."

8

Fuel training to prep for racing

"A lot of riders I know are really good at fuelling during their races, but then they don't fuel their training," Van Horn says. "But I want you to think of your training as trial situations to get your gut ready for races. That's why it's so important to fuel high-intensity workouts, not just longer rides, because then your gut gets used to digesting while under the stress of high intensity that you'll experience in racing."

The most efficient type of fuel for riders is arguably liquid nutrition, says Van Horn. If you're really trying to be more efficient, switch the bars out for a higher calorie sports drink that allows you to combine your calories with your hydration and electrolytes. She also recommends practising your pre-race meals in training so you know that your gut can handle that particular meal for breakfast—and that you can stay in aero position after eating that giant bowl of oatmeal.

9

Dial in your taper...

Ironically, sometimes you need to slow down to speed up. "Most endurance athletes are training all the time," says TrainingPeaks education program manager and cycling coach Cody Stephenson. "They're almost always in a state of fatigue. It takes time for that fatigue to convert into fitness. You can give yourself a chance to hold on to as much of that fitness as possible, while letting go of that short-term fatigue with a taper—dropping volume and intensity heading into key events."

The duration and intensity of your event changes the taper you need. Gravel racers will need longer tapers compared with cyclocross racers, since a ride such as Ghost of the Gravel is so much longer than a CX event.

Taper too much before a shorter event and you run the risk of being flat on race day. "It's highly individual, so cyclists should be trying different tapering styles to find out what works best for them," he says.

Stephenson suggests using lower-key races or big rides as a chance to practise different types of tapers to see what lets you feel freshest on race day. In general, you'll drop your volume by 30 to 50 per cent in the week before your race. Intensity should stay in, but decrease the number of intervals by 25 per cent.

10

...but don't go overboard with the time off

There is a caveat to tapering: if you're already on the low end of your training volume, struggling to get in any riding during the week, you may not need much of a taper at all. The same applies if you're racing every weekend, which is common for crit and cyclocross racers. In these cases, your training may be adjusted to avoid much intensity during

the week, but you won't have too much time away from your bike, otherwise your only training would come from racing, says Stephenson.

"A lot of coaching, and self-coaching especially, is just based on copying pro athletes, doing what you read in a magazine article about how some pro trains for Unbound," he says. "But for low-volume athletes, tapering is so much less important. It can actually be pretty counterproductive. So when I coach lower-volume athletes, we basically don't taper. We shift the schedule to avoid intensity right before a race, but we don't change the already-low volume."

11

Check your zones

Training zones are linked to efforts like endurance pace and intervals, which have come up a few times in this article. If you haven't done any kind of testing—FTP, normalized power, critical power, VO2 Max, lactate threshold—lately, consider that a sign to do a damn FTP test this weekend.

"A lot of people are training with their zones set wrong," says cycling coach Peter Glassford. "For some people, their FTP is set a bit too high because one test—maybe with a high-reading power meter—gave them their best ever FTP five years ago and they've stuck to it. Some newer riders haven't tested in a year and have improved a lot in that time."

If you're training based on incorrect zones, you're missing out on valuable adaptations. "If your power or heart rate zones are set too high, you're always working a little too hard and often may not be able to finish your workouts," Glassford says. "If they're set too low, you're not pushing yourself and you likely won't see improvements."

With your zones dialed, as well as your efforts to hone the other areas like fuelling, strength and breathing, you'll make fitness gains. Get ready to go faster.

HOW A SMALL QUEBEC CROSS COUNTRY SQUAD BECAME THE NATION'S TEAM

TIRELESSLY, CARL AUCLAIR AND CAROLINE GAUTIER HAVE BUILT PIVOT CYCLES–OTE TO NURTURE CANADIAN MOUNTAIN BIKING TALENT

by **Tara Nolan**

Photo: Antoine Caron

On an evening this past fall in Lac-Saint-Charles, a district of Quebec City, Caroline Gautier was already planning for 2025. The 2024 cross country season had wound down with the World Cup in nearby Mont-Sainte-Anne in the rear-view. Most autumn nights, Gautier spends working on this complex puzzle. Together with her partner of more than 20 years, Carl Auclair, she runs the mountain biking race team Pivot Cycles–OTE.

Caro, as Gautier is best known, is the tireless, enthusiastic organizer, figuring out all the logistics needed for the roster of nine athletes, ranging from junior to elite, for a full season of mountain biking. Besides meticulously planning the team's travel accommodations and transportation, Gautier juggles sponsors, orders each year's kit, takes photos at the races and grocery shops in every new destination so she can cook for and feed all the racers. Auclair manages all the equipment as well as some of the sponsors. At races, he's the team mechanic and takes athletes on pre-rides where he can help them hone their line choices.

It's a small outfit, but one that runs like clockwork after 11 years. OTE stands for On The Edge, a company that is the Canadian distributor of Pivot Cycles, as well as Enve and Rotor Bike Components. Auclair is an OTE partner, but isn't involved with day-to-day operations. The team started out as a way to support Québécois athletes at cross country races, but has since expanded beyond La Belle Province. "We realized there were really good juniors, not only in our club at the time, but many clubs in the Quebec area, so we decided to take all those really good athletes to get them together to become faster," explained Gautier about the team's inception.

For 2024, Rafaelle Carrier, Lily-Rose Marois and Maude Ruelland joined the team, and continue on this season. In a sense, their presence on Pivot Cycles–OTE

marks a return to the squad's roots. It started with juniors, but has mostly featured older riders these past few seasons. Rounding out the 2025 lineup are Raphael Auclair (Gautier and Auclair's son), Zorak Paillé, Owen Clark, Maxime St-Onge, Simon Ruelland and Philippe St-Laurent.

When looking at an athlete who'd like to join the team, Gautier carefully considers whether the prospect will mesh with the existing members. "We receive a lot of applications every year," she said. "We spend so many days with them when we travel; it's like a family. We really need to have people who we're sure are going to fit." This family dynamic is one that everyone interviewed for this story mentioned.

For most races, the whole team arrives a week ahead

ABOVE
From left, Maxime St-Onge, Raphael Auclair and Owen Clark

ABOVE
Maxime St-Onge races the 2025 UCI World Cup in Brazil

OPPOSITE TOP
Group training ride in Brazil

OPPOSITE LEFT
Caroline Gautier works at the Brazil World Cup, shooting photos and giving race support

OPPOSITE RIGHT
Carl Auclair tunes bikes at the team house in Brazil before race day

of the event. Gautier explained how this helps the riders to adjust to the time change. Plus, everyone can walk the track or get in some pre-race laps. Add up all the races throughout a season, and that's a lot of time spent together. Many evenings, after the meal Gautier has prepared, members of the squad relax with games of cards.

"Mountain biking is getting really difficult; the races are far apart and far away," said Lisa Holmgren, whose son Gunnar was on the team from 2020 to 2023. "The time away from home is long for the North Americans and they have to feel somewhat like they have a home environment. If they don't, it's really tough on them. So they've created that space for them," she said of Gautier and Auclair.

At the end of this past March, the athletes got to Brazil a week ahead of the first World Cups of the season. The action was just about to get going for the riders, but the team principals could almost breathe a sigh of relief. "When the season starts it gets easier because everything is booked—that's our vacation," Gautier joked.

Getting to all these races requires funding, of course. The biggest challenge the team faces each year is securing sponsors. "We have to do it all over every year," said Gautier, explaining that they like to stay with the same partners, when possible. "We want to help as much as we can with the athletes to offer more and more things," she added. "When they become better, they move to bigger things."

Gautier and Auclair manage to piece together an impressive variety of financial support, as well as equipment, from bike parts to clothing. "Pivot does a remarkable job at making it feel like there isn't that big of a difference," said Gunnar Holmgren, in reference to the small team's budget.

Pivot Cycles–OTE may have less money compared with larger teams, but its atmosphere bolsters the athletes in other ways. Once you're signed to the "Blue Train," as it's known because of the squad's recognizable jerseys, you have the space to grow. "It's nice because it's a small team; it's like a family and there's no pressure at all and everyone's having fun," Rafaelle Carrier said. "They don't want us to focus only on performance and results. They're really there for us. They want us to have fun and develop as athletes."

Gautier emphasized the importance of treating everyone the same, no matter the result—or if they're family. In early March, she'd just received the team jerseys for 2025 from clothing sponsor Jakroo. She emphasized that Raphael will see them when they're revealed to the rest of the team.

The relaxed atmosphere not only helps with success, but also alleviates the stress that may come from being sidelined with an injury, allowing an athlete the time and space to recover.

Paillé pointed out the invaluable experience Auclair and Gautier have gained simply by being on race courses over many years. Auclair will pick out the fastest lines and provide video feedback, checking in and comparing. "This was a big difference for me last year," Paillé said of his 2024 season. He also appreciates being on a team where the athletes can really push each other to get better through training together.

When Catharine Pendrel was asked if Pivot Cycles–OTE is the type of team she would have liked to have been on when she was starting out, the national team coach for Cycling Canada said: "Absolutely. They share the ambition of wanting to be the best, but also create space to develop and keep it fun."

One other challenge that may present itself to this small but mighty team will be the changes to the MTB World Series initiated at the end of last year by Warner Bros. Discovery Sports and the UCI. Pendrel said many Pivot Cycles–OTE riders are eligible for World Cups due to their strong UCI rankings. Others may need to race in a national team kit as part of Canada's quota until they have sufficient points, but can still attend with the trade team if they have met quota criteria. The team can still be in the feed zone and pits to support riders, but there will be more restrictions for course access and getting team plates this season for UCI teams that are not World Series teams. "We are still learning what this will look like in 2025," Pendrel said at the start of the season.

Teams like Pivot Cycles–OTE must now apply through Cycling Canada to register for World Cups. Gautier said this was something they previously could do themselves.

"Most athletes that would have done World Cups in the past will likely be able to attend, either because they have

Photos: Antoine Caron

“PIVOT HAS REALLY STEPPED UP AND IS PLAYING A KEY ROLE IN TAKING OUR CANADIAN ATHLETES TO THE NEXT LEVEL.”

earned entry through their UCI rankings or through one of three elite federation quotas per gender or four under-23 federation quotas per gender," Pendrel said. "With UCI rankings changing weekly and wild cards being given only one month prior to each World Cup, it just creates more challenges to plan ahead with certainty for flights and accommodations, which will make things tougher for athletes trying to plan their seasons."

For World Cups in Canada, Cycling Canada was able to get extra quotas in the past. "This is where we will see the biggest impact of the tighter entry requirements, I believe, with fewer Canadian jerseys on course at Mont-Sainte-Anne," Pendrel added.

Gautier and Auclair seem optimistic about the future of the team, although this year will reveal how much harder things could become. They are determined to figure it all out and do what they can to help their athletes navigate through this new system.

In the meantime, Pivot Cycles–OTE has established itself as a stable squad where young racers can develop their skills in a nurturing, no-pressure environment. The approach seems to be working. The team has seen some incredible results in the past few years, a rewarding testament to the work the couple have put into their Canadian mountain biking legacy.

Coming off a great 2024 season, some of the Pivot Cycles–OTE athletes had a strong start to 2025 at the US Pro Cup and UCI XCO Junior Series in Fayetteville, Ark. Carrier won both of her races during that weekend of competition. At the first World Cup in Araxá, Brazil, Clark finished 10th in the under-23 XCO race. "I think there's potential for the team to grow for sure—to evolve and be among those top-20 elite teams that are part of the circuit." Gunnar said.

"I think Pivot provides a team that young athletes can aspire to be a part of," Pendrel said. "They can see the level of the athletes currently on the team and strive to improve to earn a position there. Athletes are looking for support, yes, but they also are attracted to teams that train together, where they see an environment where they can learn and excel."

What's possibly most shocking, considering all that Auclair and Gautier do to keep Pivot Cycles–OTE running so smoothly—is that they have full-time day jobs and parent not only Raphael, but four other children. Auclair is a consultant in a machine shop, while Gautier logs a lot of overtime for an insurance company throughout the fall and winter. Together they tirelessly make it work.

"Her energy level is higher than a teenager's," said Lisa Holmgren of Gautier. "You cannot keep up with her on foot! They both put their heart and soul into the team and they have a dynamic I haven't seen in a lot of other places."

Gautier said Auclair has the vision to plan ahead for the team, while she works on the relationships with the athletes. The two principals may not get paid to run a bike team, but Pivot Cycles–OTE's longevity can be attributed to their passion for the sport, benevolence and perseverance.

"Canada has been fortunate to have several pro teams (and development teams) develop to really support our Canadian athletes," Pendrel said. "It used to be the Norco factory team that was 'the Canadian Team,' and it was a bit scary, when that team dissolved, to think of what professional teams might be able to fill that critical role. Pivot really stepped up and into that role and is playing a key part in taking our Canadian athletes to the next level."

ABOVE
Team dinner in Brazil

OPPOSITE TOP LEFT
From left, Maude Ruelland, Lily-Rose Marois and Rafaelle Carrier

OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT
Rafaelle Carrier races in Fayetteville, Ark., at the 2025 US Pro Cup

OPPOSITE LEFT
Auclair reviews video with his athletes

OPPOSITE RIGHT
Gautier prepares ice socks for the team

Photos: Antoine Caron

"I THINK WHAT THEY'VE DONE FOR THIS SPORT IS MORE THAN ANY OTHER TEAM OR FEDERATION IN CANADA."

For an athlete moving on from the team, the change can be bittersweet—for both the rider on their way out and the team members left behind. "I didn't want to leave Pivot that much because it's such a great environment," Gunnar said. "But things have to change at some point."

Paillé said that Cole Punchard, who left to join Cannondale Factory Racing for this season, was an inspiration to him. "The team is always going to change. There's always going to be new people. That's how mountain biking works. It's always a shame to see them go when you want to develop with them," Paillé said, adding that he was excited about this year's new additions to the squad. "We're going to have an amazing year as a team."

Gautier is understanding when an athlete moves on. She said they're like her kids. They'll always remain a part of the family.

Lisa Holmgren recounted how Auclair and Gautier dropped everything in the middle of the summer last year to watch Gunnar at the Olympics. "They were one of the biggest factors for Gunnar making it, all the work the previous years to get there," she said.

Lisa got a bit emotional at one point when describing what a supportive, respectful environment Gautier and Auclair have created. "If you put in your heart and you get a 60th place, they're just as happy as if you got first. I think what they've done for this sport is more than any other team or federation in Canada."

Despite an increasingly busy schedule, Gunnar still tries to connect with Gautier and Auclair when possible. "I'll always be a part of the team," he said. "Every rider who's been on it, they've made that special connection. Everyone will always be invited to dinner."

Photos: Caroline Gautier, Antoine Caron, Caroline Gautier, Antoine Caron

The Canadian Cycling Magazine

Guide to the 2025 Tour de France

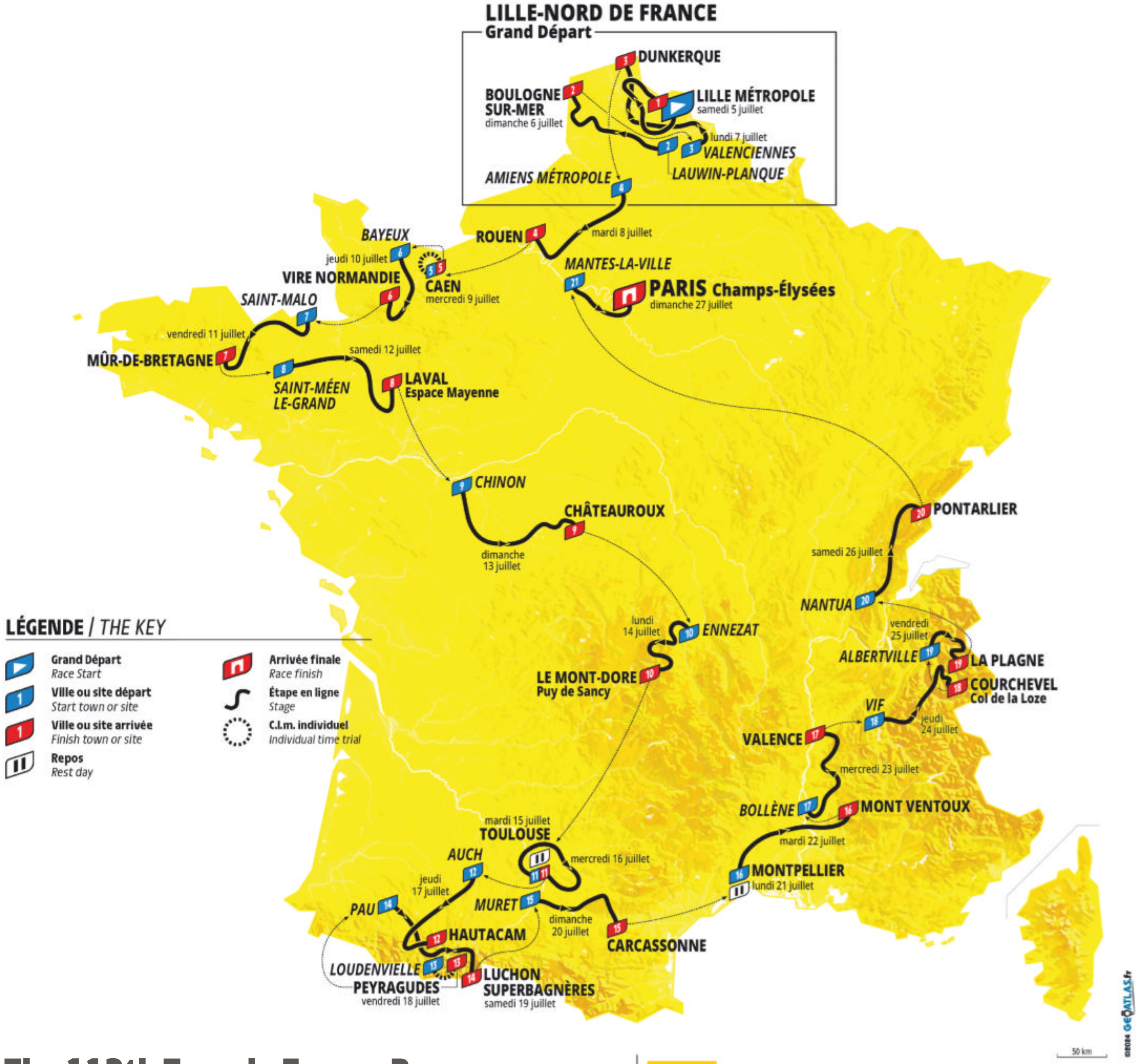
Photos: A.S.O./Charly Lopez

Contemporary rivals are set to challenge each other once again. The men's race will mark some historic milestones, while the women's is poised to take the competition to exciting new heights

by **Rob Sturney**

Last summer's Tours de France first served up a dominant performance from Tadej Pogačar in tallying up his third yellow jersey, and then the best stage of the year, as Demi Vollering and Katarzyna Niewiadoma pitched an engrossing battle on Alpe d'Huez. What the 2025 Tour de France Femmes lacks in an Alpe d'Huez or Tourmalet finale (as it had in 2024 and 2023), it makes up with a generally hilly route running southeast from Brittany to the Alps. The men's 112th edition is one for the climbers, featuring Mont Ventoux and La Plagne summit finishes, and two time trials, one of which is a mountain chrono.

The men's edition sees its Grand Départ on Saturday, July 5 in Lille and ends in Paris on Sunday, July 27, taking place entirely in France. The fourth Tour de France Femmes begins July 26 in Vannes and concludes on the Châtel les Portes du Soleil climb on Aug. 3.


LILLE-NORD DE FRANCE
Grand Départ
DUNKERQUE
BOULOGNE SUR-MER
dimanche 6 juillet
LILLE MÉTROPOLE
samedi 5 juillet
lundi 7 juillet
VALENCIENNES
LAUWIN-PLANQUE
AMIENS MÉTROPOLE
ROUEN
mardi 8 juillet
BAYEUX
jeudi 10 juillet
VIRE NORMANDIE
CAEN
mercredi 9 juillet
MANTES-LA-VILLE
PARIS Champs-Élysées
dimanche 27 juillet
SAINT-MALO
vendredi 11 juillet
MÛR-DE-BRETAGNE
samedi 12 juillet
SAINT-MÉEN LE-GRAND
LAVAL Espace Mayenne
CHINON
CHÂTEAUROUX
dimanche 13 juillet
PONTARLIER
samedi 26 juillet
NANTUA
lundi 14 juillet
ENNEZAT
vendredi 25 juillet
ALBERTVILLE
LA PLAGNE
COURCHEVEL Col de la Loze
LE MONT-DORE Puy de Sancy
VIF
jeudi 24 juillet
VALENCE
mercredi 23 juillet
BOLLÈNE
MONT VENTOUX
mardi 22 juillet
MONTPELLIER
lundi 21 juillet
mardi 15 juillet
TOULOUSE
mercredi 16 juillet
AUCH
jeudi 17 juillet
MURET
dimanche 20 juillet
PAU
HAUTACAM
CARCASSONNE
LOUDENVIELLE
PEYRAGUDES
vendredi 18 juillet
LUCHON SUPERBAGNÈRES
samedi 19 juillet
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Race Start
Ville ou site départ
Start town or site
Ville ou site arrivée
Finish town or site
Repos
Rest day
Arrivée finale
Race finish
Étape en ligne
Stage
C.l.m. individuel
Individual time trial
50 km
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The 112th Tour de France Parcours

Week 1 **From the North**

The opening week visits French Flanders, Picardy, Normandy and Brittany before heading south. The second stage into Boulogne-sur-Mer, the longest of the race, is the first hilly route. The long time trial is set for Stage 5 with a fast, flat circuit around Caen. After more opportunities for sprinters and raiders, the week concludes in the Massif Central, with the first summit finish on 3.3-km, 8 per cent Puy de Sancy.

Week 2 **Into the Pyrenees**

The second week is all about the Pyrenees. Not to downplay the sprinters' opportunities before and after, but Stages 12, 13 and 14 will be dynamite for the climbers. Stage 12 ends on 13.6-km, 7.8 per cent Hautacam, back for the first time since 2022 when Jonas Vingegaard conquered it. The next day is an 11-km time trial with the 7.9 per cent Peyragudes, and Stage 14's summit finish is Superbagnères, with the Tourmalet (which first appeared in the 1910 Tour), Col d'Aspin and Peyresourde climbed along the way. Yowza! The second rest day is in Montpellier.

Week 3 **Ventoux and the Alps**

To keep everyone off balance, the final week begins with a summit finish on the legendary Giant of Provence, Mont Ventoux, last conquered by Julian Alaphilippe and Wout van Aert in a double ascent of the climb in the 2021 edition. This bald beast is 15.7 km with an average gradient of 8.8 per cent. After a hilly stage into Valence, the big ascents return in spades on Stage 18, with three long climbs: 21.7-km Col du Glandon, 19.2-km Col de la Madeleine and the summit finish of the 26.2-km, 6.5 per cent Col de la Loze. The summit finish of Stage 19, La Plagne, where Stephen Roche famously fought back to Pedro Delgado in 1987, hasn't been in the Tour since 2002. It's back for the final GC battle of the 112th edition at the end of a long day in the Alps. July 27 marks a return to Paris, which didn't close the 2024 Tour. Last year, because of preparations for the Olympics, the race ended with a time trial in Nice. On the final day of the 2025 Tour, the peloton will roll into France's capital, before the sprinters vie for victory on the Champs-Élysées.

Photos: A.S.O

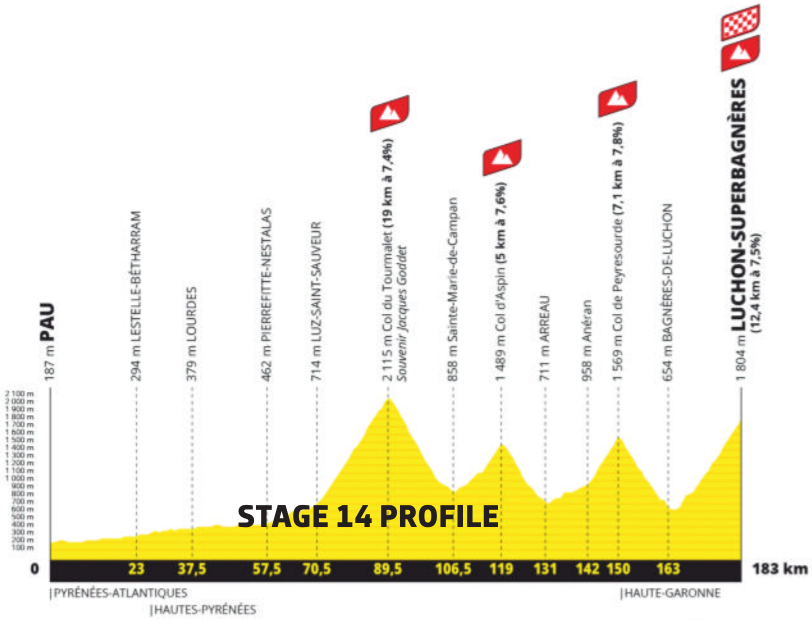
40 Years of *Rien*

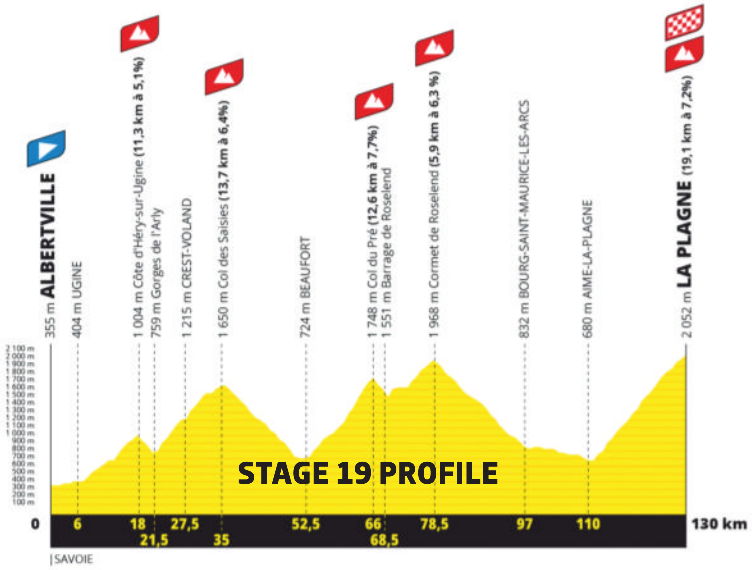
Forty years ago, Bernard Hinault became the second rider to win five Tours de France. This accomplishment saw the Badger join compatriot Jacques Anquetil with a handful of yellow jerseys and make it nine French victories in 11 years. The year 1985, however, marked the last time a Frenchman won his home Tour. *Quel dommage!*

The longer the streak, the more painful it is for the French fans. They have been teased by getting close, 2014's podium really stoking their hopes with Jean-Christophe Péraud second and Thibaut Pinot third. Romain Bardet placed runner-up and third in consecutive editions during the Sky/Ineos heyday, and 2017 was the last French podium (Bardet) before the Pogačar-Vingegaard era.

These days there's palpable tension around the race until a French rider wins a stage. Bardet ticked off this crucial milestone in last year's Grand Depart also gaining the first yellow jersey. Victor Lafay won the second stage in 2023. In 2022, Christophe Laporte alleviated Gallic anxiety only on the third to last stage.

Pinot retired at the end of 2023. Bardet is going to hang up his helmet after June's Critérium du Dauphiné. So who carries French hopes now? At 13th, Cofidis' Guillaume Martin was top Frenchman last season. Now with Groupama-FDJ, he's likely to match that distinction. Teammate David Gaudu, fourth in 2022, would like to claim it for himself. Lenny Martinez, having moved to Bahrain-Victorious from Groupama this year, is one for the future.


STAGE 14 PROFILE


STAGE 19 PROFILE

A 15TH ANNIVERSARY FOR HESJEDAL

CANADIAN
Cycling
MAGAZINE
WE RIDE A
$17,000
DREAM BIKE
Ryder
Hesjedal
Canada's
greatest?
The legendary
North
Shore
CATHARINE PENDREL
Motivated
Olympian
Canada's new
indoor bike
paradise
8 Group
riding
SECRETS
Super fast
wheelsets
Do-it-all
trail bikes
Ultralight
brakes
ALSO
REVIEWED

This year is the 15th anniversary of Ryder Hesjedal's best Tour GC result, a seventh place that was eventually upgraded to fifth after initial winner Alberto Contador and runner-up Denis Menchov both had their results scrubbed—the Spaniard because of a mid-race clenbuterol positive, and the Russian owing to adverse biological passport findings. Key days for the Canadian were when he came third on Stage 17's Col du Tourmalet summit finish and eighth on Stage 7's final ascent of Station des Rousses. But the stage that really set the table was Stage 3, a course studded with cobble sections in the final quarter of 213 km. A big crash on the cobbles took Fränk Schleck out of the race. Both Contador and Lance Armstrong lost time. Hesjedal went clear with Fabian Cancellara, Geraint Thomas, Cadel Evans and Frank's brother Andy. At the end of that stage, Hesjedal jumped up 23 spots to fourth overall.

Garmin-Transition's Canuck had a solid 2010 in general: sixth in the Volta a Catalunya, fifth in the Tour of California, runner-up in Amstel Gold and third in the inaugural Grand Prix Cycliste de Montréal to finish off his season.

Fifth was Hesjedal's first Grand Tour top-10. He would win the Giro two seasons later and post a ninth and a fifth in later Italian Grand Tours.

Tadej Pogačar

The Contenders

In 2024, Pogačar, Vingegaard, Remco Evenepoel, Primož Roglič and Mark Cavendish were the focal points of the race. Three of those riders, however, were affected by a crash in that year's Itzulia Basque Country in April. Vingegaard's participation in the Tour was in doubt for months. He didn't commit to starting until the 11th hour. Both Roglič and Evenepoel returned to racing at the 2024 Critérium du Dauphiné, which Roglič won. Evenepoel finished in seventh place. At the Tour, Roglič, sadly but to no one's surprise, left with crash injuries before popping up six weeks later to win a fourth Vuelta a Espana. Evenepoel was third at the Tour. Soon after la Grande Boucle wrapped up, he won both the Olympic time trial and road race in Paris.

The Big Four—the aforementioned riders minus Cav—plan to square off again this July. If the entire quartet is in good form, fans can anticipate a real treat.

Tadej Pogačar (Slovenia/UAE Team Emirates XRG) Earning a fourth yellow jersey will be a tough ask for Pog. The 112th edition includes some climbs that have tripped up Pogačar in the past. Vingegaard dropped him on Ventoux in 2021. With the help of van Aert, Vingegaard got the better of the Slovenian on Hautacam in 2022. In 2023, it was on Col de la Loze where Pogačar famously declared, "I'm gone. I'm dead." Teammate Adam Yates is the world champion's integral lieutenant with three consecutive top-10 overall finishes of his own, while João Almeida was fourth last year.

Early in the season, the world champion won his third UAE Tour in a canter, defended his Strade Bianche title after a hard fall and then finished third in an epic Milan-San Remo.

Jonas Vingegaard (Denmark/Visma-Lease a Bike) For 2025, Visma-LAB signed Simon Yates, who was fourth at the Tour in 2023, to work for Vingegaard. Vingegaard will also have van Aert in his corner this July. Expect two-time Paris-Nice titlist Matteo Jorgenson, Christophe Laporte and Sepp Kuss to support the Dane as he seeks his third maillot jaune. Even in defeat to the rampant Pogačar in 2024, Vingegaard was quite strong.

After eking out a Volta ao Algarve title, Vingegaard's spring went awry. A crash in Paris-Nice first lost him

Jonas Vingegaard

Photos: A.S.O./Billy Ceusters, A.S.O./Charly Lopez

Remco Evenepoel

> **"IT WAS ON COL DE LA LOZE WHERE POGAČAR FAMOUSLY DECLARED, 'I'M GONE. I'M DEAD.'"**

Primož Roglič

Photos: A.S.O./Billy Ceusters

the race lead. The resulting concussion led to his abandonment and prevented his participation in Volta a Catalunya.

Primož Roglič (Slovenia/Red Bull-Bora-Hansgrohe) Vuelta a España king Roglič attempted his second Giro in May. His Tour de France fortunes are tied directly to whether he stays on the bike both before and during July. Rogla will have reliable dynamo Alexandr Vlasov and 2024 Giro runner-up Dani Martínez on his Tour team. Early this year, Roglič was satisfactory in his season opener, Volta ao Algarve, but looked quite sharp in winning the Volta a Catalunya.

Remco Evenepoel (Belgium/Soudal-Quick Step) Once more, Evenepoel will have less-than-ideal preparation. On Dec. 3, he was hospitalized after colliding with the door of a postal vehicle while he was out on a training ride. Evenepoel suffered fractures in his ribs, right shoulder blade and right hand. His start to the season was delayed until April's De Brabantse Pijl, which he won. Mikel Landa will ride support at the Tour.

THE CANADIANS

Canadian cycling fans have been spoiled during the past three editions. Hugo Houle and Michael Woods won stages in 2022 and 2023 respectively. Derek Gee, after wowing the cycling world with third place in the 2024 Critérium du Dauphiné, finished the Tour ninth on GC in his race debut. It was the third-highest finish for a Canadian after Steve Bauer's fourth in 1988 and Ryder Hesjedal's fifth in 2010. (More on that on p.43.) Gee's Grand Tour this year is May's Giro d'Italia. In 2023, he came runner-up on four stages and was fourth twice while winning the combativity award at the Giro.

Israel-Premier Tech now has six Canadians on its roster. In the past three years, a trio of Canadians has been on the start line of la Grande Boucle. Houle and Woods—the latter now with four career Grand Tour stage triumphs on his palmares—are likely lads for the IPT lineup. Unfortunately, Woods's start to the season was similar to Vingegaard's: a strong spring before having to abandon a race due to a crash that left him unable to start the Volta a Catalunya. Guillaume Boivin is on a streak of four consecutive Tours and should get the nod as well. All will be looking for breakaways and hunting stages.

Jasper Philipsen

Wout van Aert

Biniam Girmay

A Fine Sprinters' Melee Awaits

There was more to the 2024 edition than a battle royale between today's four best Grand Tour riders and Pogačar's third title, as the fast-twitch-muscle bunch provided its share of the excitement. Mark Cavendish breaking the Tour stage win record, snagging number 35 early in the race, gave way to the Biniam Girmay story, the Intermarché–Wanty Eritrean stamping his own mark on history with three wins and the green points jersey.

Belgian Jasper Philipsen of Alpecin-Deceuninck, this March's Kuurne-Brussel-Kuurne winner, also took a hat trick of stage victories, finishing 33 points adrift of Girmay in the green jersey competition. Complicating a straightforward Girmay-Philipsen rematch in 2025 is the looming presence of Wout van Aert, who took three 2024 Vuelta stages and already has a Tour points jersey of his own. Further sweetening the mix is the inclusion of Milan-San Remo conqueror Mathieu van der Poel; yet another Belgian sprinter, European champion Tim Merlier of Soudal Quick-Step, winner of three Giro stages last year; and Lidl-Trek's Italian Jonathan Milan.

Milan took home the 2023 and 2024 purple Giro points jerseys while racking up four wins, including his own hat trick of 2024 Giro stages. He's pure power, but his positioning in the sprint bunch isn't always precise, which accounts for eight runner-up places in those two points classification-winning editions of the Giro.

This season, Milan recorded five bunch sprint wins in his first 21 racing days. Merlier logged six bunch sprint wins in 21 days.

Sprinters' days bookend the Tour, and there are seven flat stages in total.

Photos: A.S.O./Billy Ceusters, A.S.O./Billy Ceusters, A.S.O./Charly Lopez

The Golden Jubilee of the Polka Dot Jersey

This year is a special anniversary at la Grande Boucle, the 50th year of the polka dot jersey for the king of the mountains classification. The best climber had been honoured since the 1933 Tour, but it wasn't until 1975 that he got the iconic jersey. Also in 1975, Eddy Merckx failed to win his sixth yellow jersey and the race finale changed from the velodrome de Vincennes to the Champs-Élysées.

The odd thing is that no one seems to know exactly why red polka dots on a white kit was designated as a way to identify the leader of the classification. Some say it had to do with the wrapper of a chocolate company that was one of the Tour's sponsors, and others contend the pattern was based on jerseys Tour organizer Felix Levitan had spotted [chuckle!] at a velodrome, but the evidence for both these theories is skimpy.

This summer both EF Education-Easypost's Richard Carapaz and AG Insurance-Soudal's Justine Ghekiere will return to defend their mountains jerseys.

Three notable riders to win the dots

The first fellow to win the distinctive jersey in 1975, Belgian Lucien Van Impe wore it for every stage but the first double stage. Van Impe had already come top in the mountains classification in the pre-dots days, and he'd take it three more times for a total of six. In 1976, he traded the polka dot jersey for the yellow jersey in Paris, missing out earning both kits by a single mountain point to Giancarlo Bellini.

Richard Virenque is the Polka Dot King. This French legend claimed seven jerseys from 1994 to 2004, including four in a row. Along the way he earned seven stage wins and finished in the GC top-10 six times, following up third place to Bjarne Riis in 1996 with runner-up to Jan Ullrich the next season.

After winning a lot of races in Colombia, Luis "Lucho" Herrera came to Europe, still as an amateur, to take part in bigger events. The 1984 Tour was open to amateurs, which Herrera raced with a Colombian national team of non-pros. During that edition, he won at the top of Alpe d'Huez, becoming the first Colombian to win a stage of the Tour de France. The next year, the Colombian team turned into a professional one, Café de Colombia, and helped Lucho Herrera secure his first polka-dot jersey along with two more stage wins.

Richard Carapaz in polka dots

Photos: A.S.O./Billy Ceusters

Katarzyna Niewiadoma

La Tour de France Femmes

Can the fourth women's edition match the excitement of that thrilling Alpe d'Huez showdown in August 2024? It was breathless stuff as the yellow-clad Katarzyna Niewiadoma chased Demi Vollering through the 21 hairpin turns, the time gap between them expanding and shrinking.

With no Olympic Games this year to make the schedule fussy, the fourth Tour de France Femmes begins on July 26 in Vannes, Brittany and, with nine stages, it concludes at the ski station Châtel les Portes du Soleil. The final day has a long, gradual ascent to end the race, but Stage 8 is the Queen Stage simply because it ends atop the famous Col de la Madeleine, a real brute at 18.6 km of 8.1 per cent.

Demi Vollering's team switch—from SD Worx-Protime to French squad FDJ-Suez with its powerhouse French duo of Évita Muzic and Juliette Labous, is the biggest development in the Women's WorldTour. FDJ-Suez, however, lost Cecilie Uttrup Ludwig to champion Niewiadoma's Canyon/SRAM Zondacrypto. Nevertheless, Vollering, the Vuelta España Femenina title-holder, must be considered the favourite for a second maillot jaune. (She took her first in 2023.)

Vollering, who won her FDJ-Suez debut at the Volta Femenina de la Comunitat Valenciana, will now have ex-teammate Lotte Kopecky as one of her main competitors for the yellow jersey. The world champion was runner-up to Vollering in the 2023 Tour and second overall in last year's Giro d'Italia Women. The Belgian's climbing has improved throughout the past couple of seasons. Expect comeback kid Anna van der Breggen to support Kopecky in France.

Lidl-Trek let Giro champion Elisa Longo Borghini go to UAE Team ADQ (she promptly scored February's UAE Tour title), but the U.S. outfit can still boast GC riders like Gaia Realini and Lucinda Brand. Another crack tandem is Fenix-Deceuninck's Dutch duo of Puck Pieterse, last year's best young rider, and Pauliena Rooijakkers, who first achieved fourth at the 2024 Giro and then stood on the Tour podium with Niewiadoma and Vollering.

In 2023, seven Canadians started. Last year, six Canucks lined up for the Grand Départ in Rotterdam. Canadian champion Olivia Baril of Movistar finished highest at 41st. Clara Emond (EF-Oatly-Cannondale) took a remarkable win in the 2024 Giro d'Italia, giving her a compelling case to start her second consecutive Tour. Baril, Simone Boilard (Uno-X Mobility), and Emond's teammate Magdeleine Vallières Mill have started in all three editions of the Tour de France Femmes.

Photos: A.S.O./Thomas Maheux

Demi Vollering

Olivia Baril, 2023

Elisa Longo Borghini, 2022

Lotte Kopecky, 2023

Photos: A.S.O./Charly Lopez, A.S.O./Thomas Maheux, A.S.O./Thomas Maheux, A.S.O./Charly Lopez

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GEAR

Gravel
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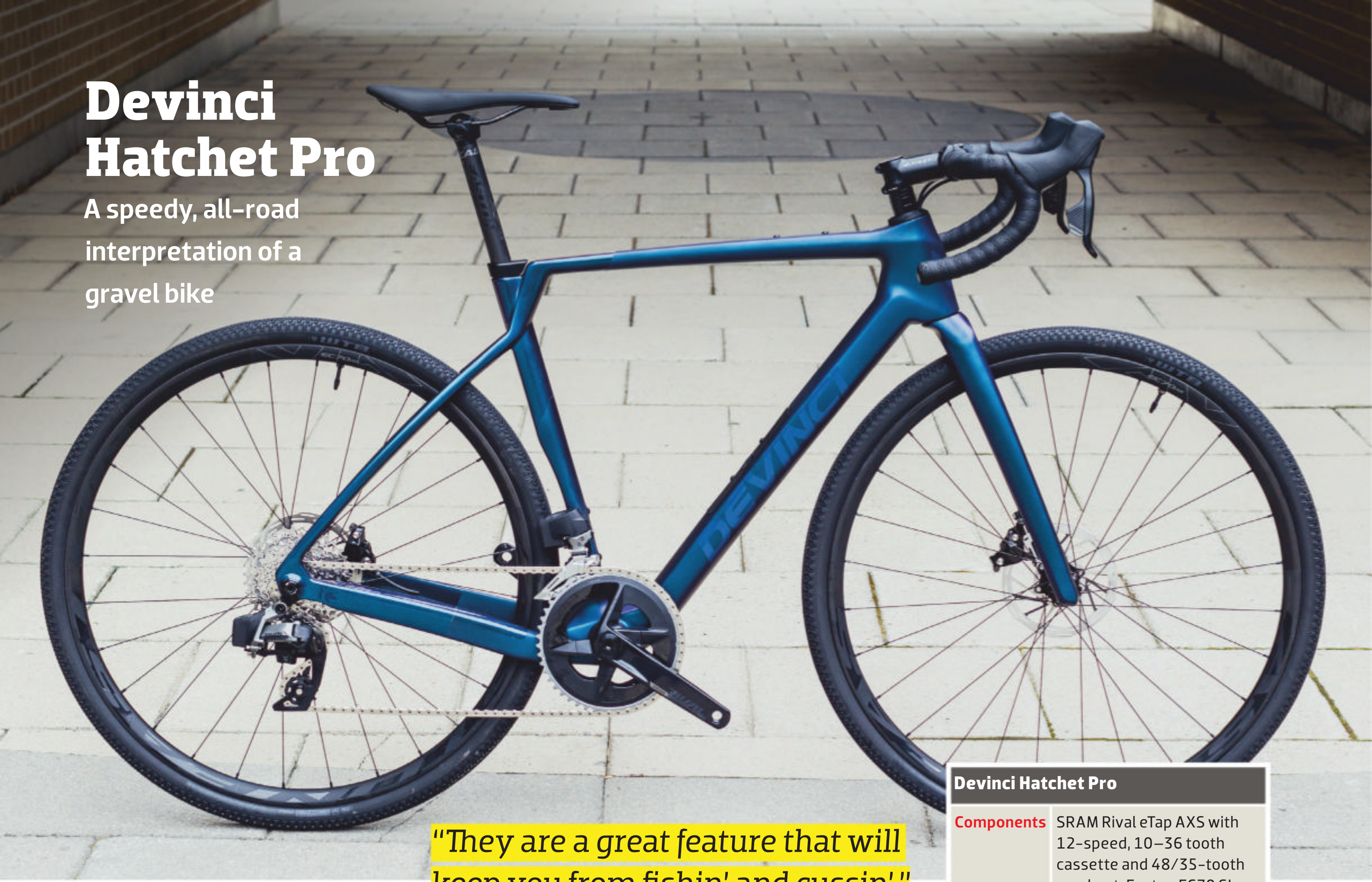
Photo: Hiep Vu

Devinci Hatchet Pro

A speedy, all-road interpretation of a gravel bike



> "They are a great feature that will keep you from fishin' and cussin'."

reviewed by **Matthew Pioro**

GEAR

GRAVEL TEST

My first rides of the season were on the Devinci Hatchet Pro. The bike launched in late February, too early to get outside. But, I had a test rig by the time conditions were good enough for riding—me dressed in umpteen layers, the side of paved roads essentially turned to gravel tracks thanks to the deposits of retreating snowbanks and the actual gravel roads littered with ice sectors. Truly the terrain of a bike designed and assembled in Chicoutimi, Que.

The new Hatchet Pro is quite a departure from the Hatchet Carbon. The older model was a mountain bike-inspired gravel bike, a natural direction for the company that's known for its downhill and trail bikes. The Hatchet Pro is more on the all-road side of the gravel bike spectrum, built for racing, not bumping along in the woods. "The official number for the Hatchet's increase in stiffness is 30 per cent, which is insane," said Devinci marketing manager Bastien Major. Thirty per cent is a big figure, one that would make me suspicious without Major's context. "The previous generation of Hatchet, the carbon version, that bike was a noodle. It was super comfortable, compliant and fun. But for the new Hatchet, we needed a stiffer chassis."

The latest bike has the carbon layup and geometry for taking on fast rides. The handling is road bike-like. It was easy to set up the Hatchet Pro for an aggressive riding position. If I were to line up for an event, one with a minimal amount of singletrack, I'd opt for a stem slightly longer than the 80-mm Easton EA70 that came on my size medium test machine. I did, however, like the less stretched-out position with my early season (low) flexibility and cold-weather layers.

Officially, the Hatchet Pro can run 45-mm-wide tires. Major pointed out to me that it's the largest size that most riders use. I took his point. We hear a lot about pros using wide treads for their races. It's a trend that's barely a year old. Lachan Morton fitted a 2.1" (53 mm) tire on his front wheel at Unbound in 2024. A few months later when the Trek Checkmate debuted, it received some criticism for its 45-mm clearance. But remember, the development of these bikes began years before their release. In the case of the Hatchet Pro, it was 2021 when things got underway. Also remember that 45-mm-wide tires leave 6 mm of space between the frame and the fork of the Hatchet. If you follow gravel racer Julien Gagné, you have seen that he put 29 x 2.0 Maxxis MaxxLite tires on the Hatchet Pro he raced at this past April's Sea Otter Classic gravel race.

Devinci Hatchet Pro	
Components	SRAM Rival eTap AXS with 12-speed, 10–36 tooth cassette and 48/35-tooth crankset, Easton EC70 SL handlebar, EC70 seatpost and stem, BB386 bottom bracket, universal derailleur hanger
Wheels	Easton EC70 AX with 40c WTB Vulpine S tires
Sizes	S, M, L, XL
Price	$6,799
Website	*devinci.com*

The bike can take a dropper post if you like. There's a storage door on the down tube. Once you're inside the frame, you'll notice the guides for any cables you might need to run. They are a great feature that will keep you from fishin' and cussin'.

On my rides, I was not only struck by the handling of the frame—perfect for my area with a lot of tarmac to connect not-so-technical gravel—but the wheels, too. The Easton EC70 AX hoops roll quickly and smoothly. The 40c WTB Vulpine S tires worked pretty well for all the paved roads and adequately on the gravel. Ice? Meh. I wasn't going to run spikes just for those sectors. They were more "no brakes, no mistakes" affairs. When I found better traction, the bike was fast and fun, just the way it was designed to be.

Photos: Matt Stetson

Trek Slash+

A light-power e-enduro bike for the toughest descents

reviewed by **Terry McKall**

With the Slash+, Trek takes the same light-assist approach that it used with its Fuel EXe. The EXe draws from the design of the Fuel EX and features a lower-weight, lighter-power motor compared with many eMTBs. The trail bike became an instant hit. Trek then put the Slash enduro rig through the same transformation. But there are some differences with the results. Where the EXe is a trail bike with broad appeal, the Slash+ stands out as a niche machine that sits in contrast to its higher-powered e-enduro competitors to a high degree.

As an electric version of the Slash, the eMTB is impressively faithful to its motor-free counterpart. The Slash+ is built around the same high-pivot suspension design with 170-mm travel front and rear, same stock MX wheels and, with the addition of a slim TQ-HPR50 motor, the frame casts a similar silhouette to the Slash. Trek adds a few parts tailored to the heavier bike, such as SRAM's uber-powerful, if finicky, Maven brakes.

The Slash+ will tick off the elevation gain between laps easier than the Slash, of course, boosted by that TQ motor. The light-assist drive unit runs quietly and adds a maximum of 300 W to the power you put into the pedals, as long as you keep spinning at a reasonable cadence. These figures mean considerably less support than some other e-enduro bikes, but Trek is aiming for a rig that feels like a Slash, just with less effort required, instead of a bike that feels like an ebike.

It's a trade-off that pays off on the descents. When speeds really pick up, and the going gets steep, the Slash+ starts to shine. The fancy suspension, and the bit of extra weight from the drive system, make the bike feel calm compared with the world flying by outside your goggles. While the high pivot keeps the Slash+ stable, the 27.5" rear wheel ensures this big "eeb" steers precisely and lightly. Your fastest, hardest trail is what the Slash+ was designed for and where it is most at home.

This performance is helped along by a suite of top-end parts. The suspension is by RockShox: Vivid Ultimate shock and Zeb Ultimate fork. The Bontrager Line Pro 30 wheels are equipped with TyreWiz electronic pressure sensors. There's the RockShox Reverb AXS wireless dropper post. SRAM's X0 T-Type wireless electronic drivetrain is hardwired into the 580-Wh TQ battery in place of the usual derailleur-mounted battery. All the added bits, from suspension to TyreWiz, require a bit of effort from the rider to keep everything running as intended. This is not a set-and-forget rig. But that's the cost (beyond the actual, substantial cost) of a niche bike like this one. If you put in the time to set it up right, the Slash+ rewards that effort.

There are other midweight eMTBs that have more power, weigh less and come close to the downhill performance of the Slash+. They also have a better performance across a wider range of riding situations compared with the Trek's hyperfocus on the gnarliest terrain. But the Slash+ is a purebred, laser focused on delivering that niche performance above all other considerations.

Trek seems to know a non-race light-assist, high-end, high-tech, high pivot e-enduro bike isn't going to be for everyone. For that reason, there are only two models available with the 9.9 being the higher-priced option. But niche bikes by definition aren't supposed to have mass appeal. If the features of the bike are exactly what you're looking for, the Slash+ delivers. And in those extreme moments, where other bikes are on edge, it absolutely shines.

Trek Slash+ 9.9 X0

Components	SRAM X0 T-Type 12-speed wireless drivetrain with 10–52 tooth cassette. Four-piston SRAM Maven Silver brakes, RockShox Reverb AXS dropper post (100-mm S, 170-mm M, L, XL), 780-mm Bontrager Line Pro handlebar and 35-mm Bontrager Line Pro stem
Drive System	TQ-HPR50 with 50 Nm of torque and 580-Wh TQ battery
Suspension	RockShox Vivid Ultimate shock with 170 mm travel, RockShox Zeb Ultimate fork with 170 mm travel
Wheels	Bontrager Line Pro 30 carbon-fibre wheels with TyreWiz pressure sensors (27.5" S, 29" front and 27.5" rear M-XL), 29 x 2.5 Bontrager SE6 Team Issue front and 27.5 x 2.5 Bontrager SE5 Team Issue rear tires
Sizes	S, M, L, XL
Price	$16,000
Website	*trekbikes.com*

"Your fastest, hardest trail is what the Slash+ was designed for and where it is most at home."

GEAR
TRAIL TEST

Photos: Terry McKall

How to Buy the Right Gravel Gear

Advice on choosing tires, handlebars, storage and shoes

by **Jake Williams**

GEAR

IN DEPTH

For new and experienced gravel riders looking for gear, there has never been more selection. When analysis paralysis strikes, it can be more deflating than a pinch flat. The next time you're replacing rubber or contemplating an upgrade, remember these tips to help you make the best decision.

MAXXIS RAMBLER 700X45C/HYPR-X/EXO/TR

Launched this past April, the latest Maxxis **Rambler** gravel tire ($100, *maxxis.com*) has some changes inside and outside. The casing uses a new nylon that makes the tire tougher. Outside, the new rubber, Hypr-X, is a mix of the company's road (Hypr) and mountain bike (MaxxSpeed) silica compounds. It gives you a good amount of speed and traction, even on wet gravel tracks.

Tire squish

Tread and volume are the places to start when you're looking at tires. A chunky, tall knob will work best in rough and loose conditions, whereas something slick or low down in the centre with side shoulder knobs is great for fast-rolling hardpack. The width of the tire (commonly written 40c or 45c, which corresponds roughly to 40 mm and 45 mm, respectively) gives you an indication of overall volume. Always check that the tires actually fit within your frame and fork. Wider tires allow for lower pressures and a more comfortable ride. It gets tricky, however, as many tires are offered in different compounds. Typically more expensive versions of the same tire will give a more supple ride feel, but you may sacrifice durability as a result. Most folding tires are tubeless these days, which is handy as skipping the inner tube allows you to run lower pressures without the risk of flatting.

The bar minimum

For gravel cyclists, handlebars are so much more than just a place to bolt shifters. A bar with a lot of flare gives you a wider position in the drops for more control and confidence in technical terrain. To satisfy various hand positions (enjoy an aero position?) while still maintaining real estate for light and computer mounts, look for a bar with an extension, often U-shaped. Bars that are too wide can cause shoulder and neck pain, so try to match the bar's width to that of your shoulders. Going narrow gets you aero, but make sure there's enough room for the handlebar bag.

PRO-WING AGX
PRO-WING AGX
FSA
FSA

The FSA **Pro-Wing AGX loop** alloy handlebars ($147, *fsaproshop.com*) have some serious flare at 25 degrees, which will help you rip your descents. The U-shape extension, combined with the standard spots on the tops, hoods and drops, gives you many places for your hands. There's 120 mm of drop and 80 mm of reach. A size 42-mm bar weighs 380 g.

Photos: tktk

On-body and on-bike storage

Whether you prefer to carry gear on the body instead of the bike, or you're just going long and don't want to stop, a riding vest may be the answer. These lightweight backpacks maximize the storage up front with several pockets built into the chest straps, perfect for food on the go. Rear compartments should be mounted high and sit just below the shoulder blades so that jersey pockets are still accessible while riding. Look for multiple adjustable chest straps to personalize the fit for comfort. Most packs offer a small bladder for easy hydration, too, just make sure the hose clips out of the way when the trail gets bumpy.

To keep gels and bars handy, the top tube bag is the way to go. It's one of the easiest bags to attach to the frame. Ensure the zipper is designed in a way that lets you work it with one hand.

The hook-and-loop straps of the Osprey **Escapist** top-tube bag ($66 *osprey.com*) hold it securely to your bike. The bag's sides have some structure to them, which makes it easier to zip open and zip up. Put a battery inside, and then run a cable out of the bag's port to charge a light or head unit.

deuter
deuter

The Deuter **Rogla 5** backpack ($145, *roirecreation.com*) has features of both a vest and a pack. Its straps allow you to stash a gel or phone and keep them easily accessible. At the back, there's space for a 2-l hydration bladder and other essentials. The vest-like design means you can get at your back jersey pockets.

Any SPD for me?

For most riders, a conventional mountain bike shoe will do the job—a lugged-tread for a bit of walking along with a stiff sole for power transfer. With more manufacturers, however, offering gravel-specific shoes, the choice isn't always clear. These gravel shoes tend to be lighter with a less bulky tread. If speed and on-bike time are the priorities, focus on the stiffness of the outsole. If you are going long and might spend some time walking, look toward light weight and comfort. Try on as many pairs as possible. What looks good may not agree with your feet. The choice of Boa dials, laces or hook-and-loop straps may come down to comfort as much as performance.

BOA
BOA
ekoi

The nylon soles of the Ekoï **Perf XC R4** shoes ($515, *ekoi.com*) mix walkability with pedalling stiffness. The heels and toes are reinforced to protect you from whatever might kick up from the road. Two Boa dials on each shoe manage the fit.

The Shimano **RX600** women's shoes ($260, *ridecanada.shimano.com*) are true gravel shoes. The Boa dials and hook-and-loop straps make the fit highly tuneable. The lugs have a bit of squish to them for better traction. The RX600 are great for bikepacking, but their carbon-reinforced soles mean they're ready to race if you are.

Photos: tktk

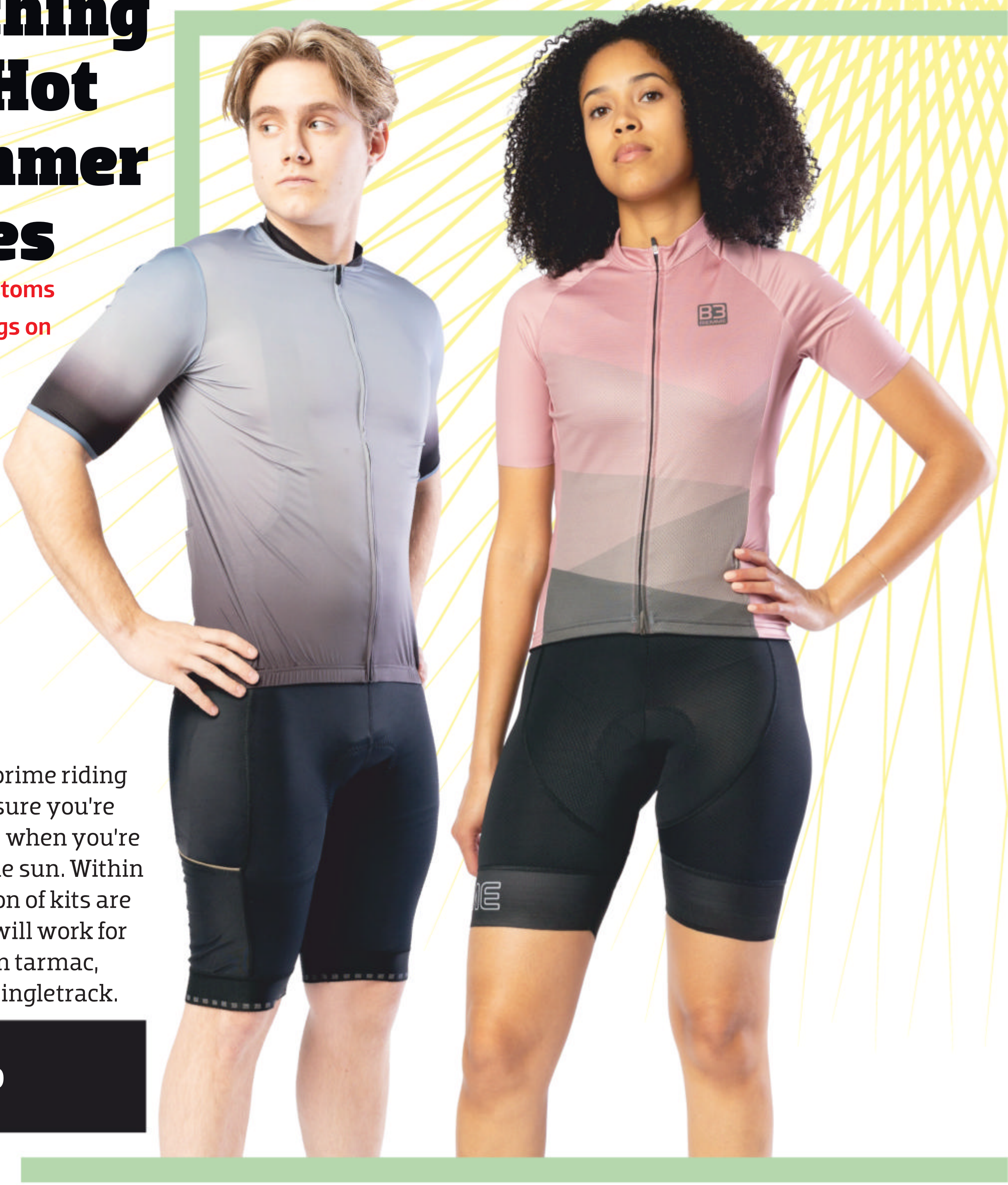
Clothing for Hot Summer Rides

Tops and bottoms for big outings on roads, both rough and smooth, and trails

Summer is prime riding time. Make sure you're comfortable when you're out under the sun. Within this collection of kits are pieces that will work for your rides on tarmac, gravel and singletrack.

GEAR

RAPID FIRE

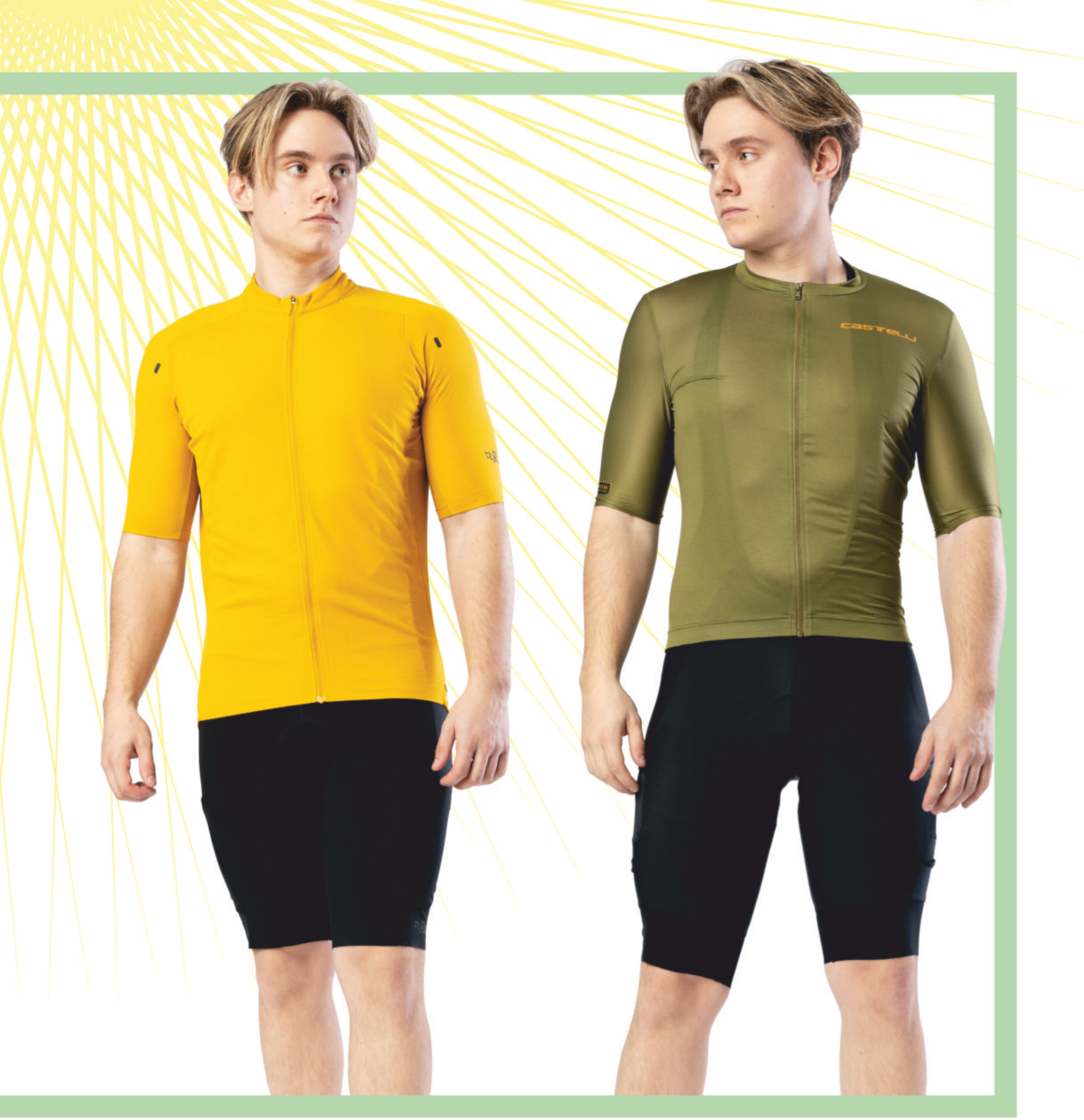


Gravel

The fabric used for the Shimano **Evolve Avventura men's jersey** ($125, *ridecanada.shimano.com*) feels sleek and slippery. The look of the sweat-wicking material is pretty sharp, too. The fit is not racing-tight, just snug enough for a long day on the gravel bike. The **Evolve Avventura bib shorts** ($150) have cargo pockets, naturally. They are made with a durable mesh, no flimsy pockets here.

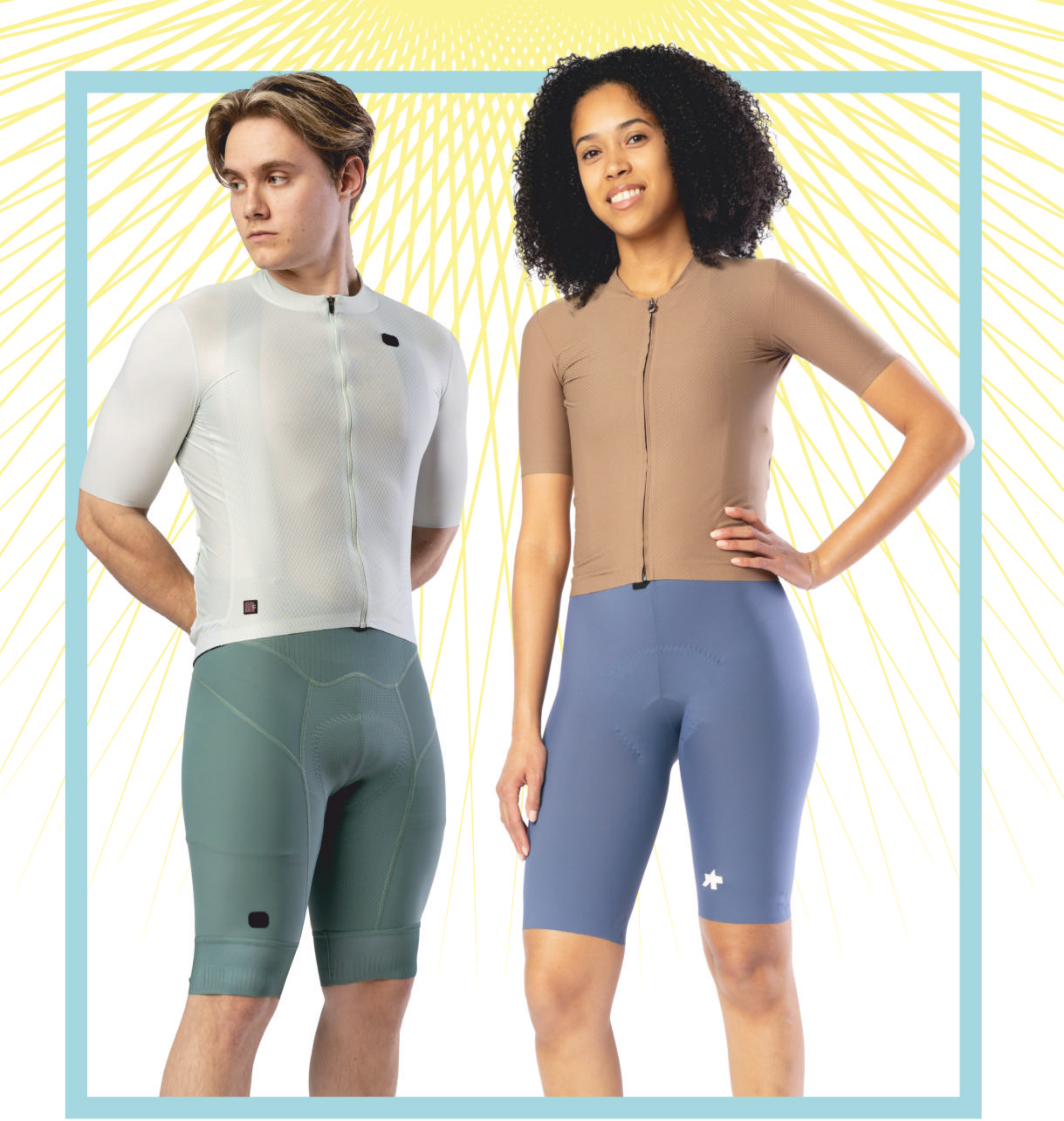
The Biemme **Badlands women's jersey** ($120, *biemmeamerica.ca*) features raglan sleeves, which help with your range of motion. What you see here is a pre-production jersey with a single-direction zipper. The one you'll get will have a two-way zip. At the back, there's a waterproof pocket for a few valuable items you might need to protect if the weather turns. Sections of the **Legend 2.1 SB shorts** ($160) have a ceramic coating to boost durability. The chamois is perforated for added ventilation.

Photos: Hiep Vu



The Rab **Cinder men's jersey** ($135, *rab.equipment*) has a more natural-feeling fabric than most tops. It's actually made from a yarn composed of recycled polymer and coffee grounds. For real. The coffee fibres add UV-ray protection and odour control. (No, that doesn't mean you'll smell like a shot of espresso.) A silicone gripper keeps the dropped hem in place. Some jerseys have back pockets that hold stuff well, but are a struggle to access. Not the case with the Cinder's pockets. The straps of the **Cinder cargo bib shorts** ($180) are thinner than most. Sticking with Rab's high environmental standards, the durable water repellent coating used is fluorocarbon-free.

Lift up the Castelli **Unlimited Entrata 3 men's jersey** ($150, *castelli-cycling.com*) and you'll notice it's totally summer weight. Long narrow back pockets ensure that nothing is ejected on bumpy roads. The fit is called regular, not as tight as race, but you still might want to size up. The pockets on **Unlimited cargo bib shorts** ($200) are well-crafted. Each one has a flap at the top for extra security. They are bellowed so they expand elegantly when you stuff in a bar or gel.



Road

The new Giordana **FR-C men's jersey** ($300, *unoimports.com*) sports a fabric with a hexagonal mesh pattern on the back and diamond mesh on the front. Both wick away moisture well. The back also has carbon threaded in certain areas to keep the pockets from sagging. A fourth zippered pocket holds cards or other small essentials. The **FR-C bib shorts** ($375), which have also been redesigned, have the same level of compression as their predecessors, but get a boost in durability and breathability. The chamois is infused with aloe vera to manage odours.

The Assos **Dyora R S11 women's jersey** ($220, *assos.com*) is second from the top in the company's road line. Think of the R series of clothing as Assos's Ultegra-level gear, pretty much the same as the high-end stuff but at a lower cost. The AirCell fabric is light and aero, perfect for racing. The fit is quite tight. While the **Dyora R S11 bib shorts** ($280) don't have a design for easy nature breaks, the legs are nicely compressive and the chamois is comfortable along many kilometres.

Photos: Hiep Vu

Cycling has always been there...

and if you need us, so will we.

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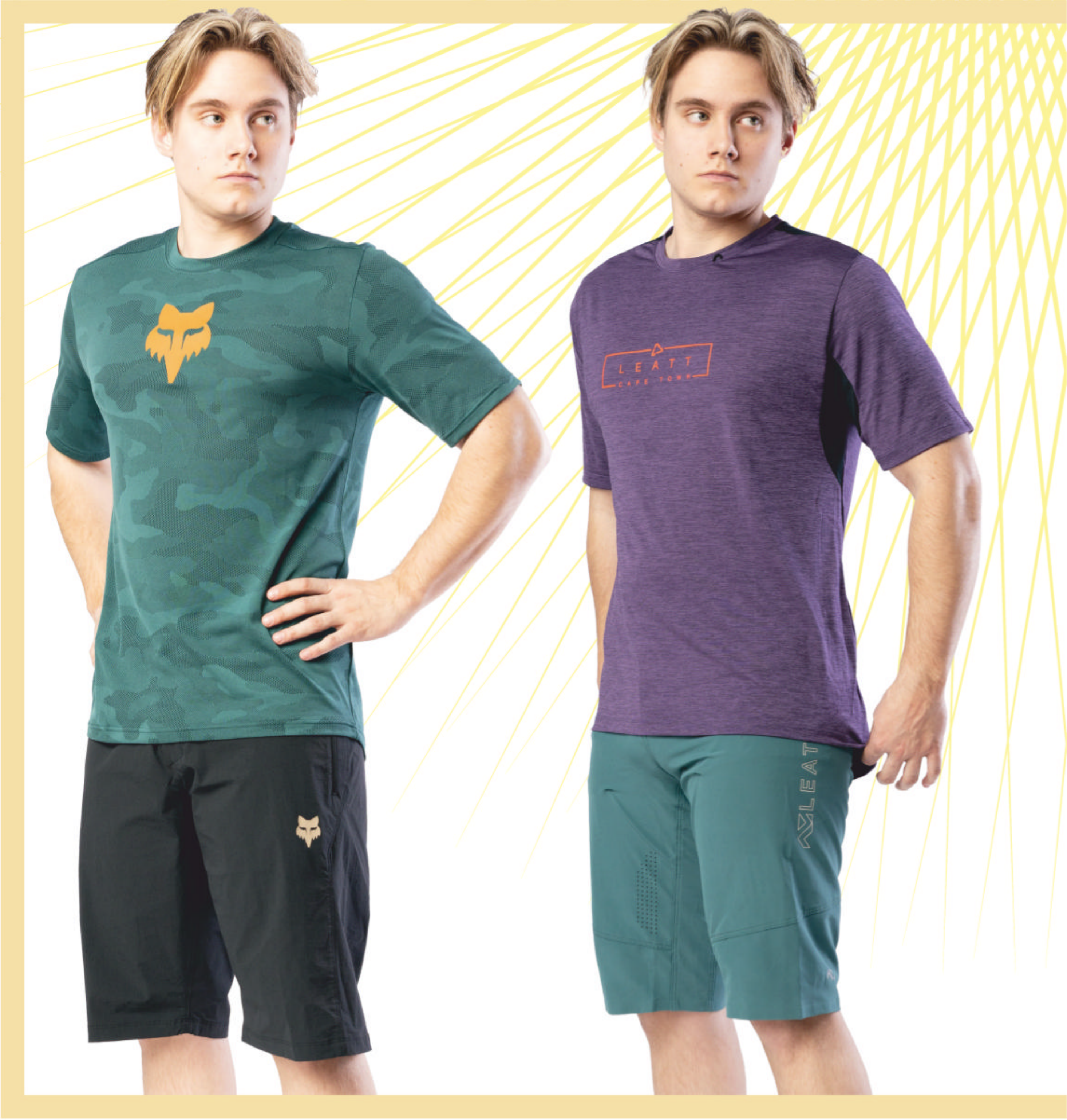


MTB

This year, Trek partnered with Fox to co-brand clothes by the mountain bike apparel and gear company. The Trek/Fox **Ranger men's shirt** ($75, *trekbikes.com*) is built with a comfy, airy mesh that is also nicely floppy. It offers an ultraviolet protection factor (UPF) of 50. A ratchet buckle snugs up the waist of the **Ranger shorts with liner** ($130). The relaxed fit performs well on the trail, and looks later good when you're recounting the ride on the patio.

The Leatt **Trail 1.0 men's jersey** ($90, *mtb.leattcanada.ca*) is another garment that's made with a coffee ground-infused fabric. It helps to keep you cool on the trails. Leatt often engineers smart features into its clothing. In this case, there's a zipper pocket that holds a goggle wipe. The **Trail 3.0 shorts** ($185) are for all-day rides. They have traditional front pockets and a zipped one at the leg. The liner with dual-density chamois is removable.

Photos: Hiep Vu

The mesh of the POC **Motion Air women's jersey** ($90, *poc.com*) offers good ventilation, while also feeling more durable than some other shirts. The material is made of recycled polyester. The semi-raglan sleeves give off a retro vibe and provide a good range of motion. The **Motion Air shorts** ($160) have great ventilation provided by perforations at inner thighs. The pockets are to the side, keeping your keys off the top of your leg.

The Fasthouse **Alloy Ronin men's shirt** ($120, *ogc.ca*) is the company's top-of-the-line jersey. The mesh on the back, where there's a drop hem, is slightly lighter than at the front. The fit is slim for racing. The **Kicker short** ($174) has a low-tech, but highly functional, shoe string-like belt. The pockets are simple, similar to your favourite jeans. One zipper vent on the right side keeps things breezy, like your riding.—*MP*

Helmets for All Cycling Disciplines

Find the best lid for the type, or types, of riding you do

While bikes seem to be getting more and more specific, helmets—mercifully for our wallets—are often equally at home on all kinds of rides. There are exceptions, of course. An aero one is usually most common on the road. A visor likely means the helmet is for the trails, but won't necessarily be out of place on some gravel adventures. Take a spin through these lids. One of them will definitely work for whatever terrain you're on.

A

B

C

Triple threats: Gravel, road and cross country

The riders of Scott-SRAM MTB Racing use the Scott **Centric Plus** helmet ($270, *scott-sports.com*) A, yet it would fit right in to a fast group ride or gravel race because of its aerodynamics. For extra safety, it's equipped with MIPS Air Node, the slim low-friction layer fused to the padding that doesn't obstruct the helmet's vents. The thin pads have well-placed rubber grippers to keep things in place.

The Mavic **Comete SL** helmet ($299, *mavic.com*) B with MIPS offers a lot of coverage with its foam and polycarbonate shell. The large vents, however, ensure that wind moves through the Comete SL well. Also keeping things light and airy are the thin side straps and fit system.

The Bell **XR Spherical** helmet ($360, *ogc.ca*) C has layers, many layers. There's MIPS, the thin material that slips in a crash to mitigate rotational forces. There's also Bell's Spherical technology, which moves within the helmet, too, to help manage the energy of a hit. Finally, there's the different densities of the expanded polystyrene (EPS) foam that dull the forces of some blows. Other features include the easy-to-use Fidlock buckle and Ionic+ padding that keeps odours at bay.

Photos: Matt Stetson

D

F

E

G

Double duty: Road and gravel

The Lazer **Z1 Kineticore** helmet ($400, *lazersport.ca*) D is an airy lid for fast rides. Unlike many helmets here, it doesn't use MIPS. Instead, the company developed Kineticore, its own angular impact mitigation system. Inside the helmet are foam blocks designed to crumple on impact. Do they work? Well, Virginia Tech's helmet-testing initiative has given the Z1 a five-star rating, which is tops. Lazer says its own studies show the helmet's ventilation makes you 3 per cent cooler than riding without a helmet, but you wouldn't do that anyway, right?

WaveCel is the angular impact mitigation system by Trek. You could think of WaveCel as a MIPS alternative. That cell structure, seen in the Trek **Circuit WaveCel** helmet ($215, *trekbikes.com*) E, is made to collapse in a crash, addressing the forces of an impact. The Circuit comes with mounts for lights, or pop an action camera on the top to capture the speed of your crits.

The POC **Cytal** helmet ($420, *poc.com*) F launched this past March. Like its predecessor, the Cytal Carbon, the new helmet has what the company calls a wing. The section dividing the front and rear vents channels air through the helmet for the optimal ventilation and aerodynamics. Also within the helmet is MIPS Air Node for added protection.

The Ekoï **Gara MIPS** helmet ($345, *ekoi.com*) G is worn by top roadies, and does well on fast gravel rides. Its 20 vents guide air over your head to cool you down. A MIPS layer boosts protection. The Gara's retention system has a great range, so you can really nail in the fit with the adjustment dial.

H

For the trails

While the 21 vents of the Lazer **Coyote Kineticore** helmet ($160, *lazersport.ca*) **H** make it great for summer, you can outfit the lid with the company's Turnsys winter liner ($30) to trap heat better and cover your ears. Another top addition is the LED tail light ($50) that you can attach at the back. Inside, generous padding keeps everything comfortable throughout long rides.

Like the Circuit, the Trek **Rally WaveCel** ($215, *trekbikes.com*) **I** is also action-camera ready. Raise the visor up to its highest of three positions to take advantage of sunglasses storage, or perch your goggles. The helmet's coverage is excellent all around your head. Trek's WaveCel technology helps to lessen the effects of the rotational forces that come with a crash. The cells on this Rally are also designed to keep air moving well for good ventilation.

The Leatt **MTB 2.0 All Mountain** helmet ($185, *mtb.leattcanada.ca*) **J** uses the company's angular impact mitigation system called 360° Turbine, which sees the placement of energy absorbing discs on the inside. The visor is the most malleable of the helmets presented here. It's built to bust in a crash, reducing the energy of rotational forces. The inner liner is washable so you can keep everything fresh.

Over the front three vents of the Abus **MoDrop MIPS** helmet ($200, *abus.com*) **K** is mesh. But if you stop in some buggy woods, those demons will get in through the top opening. However, the venting is good so once that you start pedalling, they'll be blown out the back. The MoDrop is a top all-around helmet for the trails.

The funkiest looking lid in this bunch is the Smith **Forefront 3** helmet ($320, *smithoptics.com*) **L**. It does come in tamer colours, such as slate, black, chalk, if they are more your jam. (What you see here is "matte zero gravity.") Apart from the EPS foam, there are three other notable protection features within the Forefront: MIPS, a nylon-injected roll cage and Koroyd, the honeycomb-like tubes that sit within many of the vents. Even with all these systems, air moves well throughout the helmet.

Some plush padding sits inside the Giro **Manifest Spherical** helmet ($410, *ogc.ca*) **M**. MIPS and the Spherical technology work to address rotational forces. The multi-density EPS form is reinforced with an arch. A well-placed strip of rubber at the back gives your goggles some grip as you rip down the trail.—*MP*

Photos: Matt Stetson

K

I

L

LEATT
CAPE TOWN. SA. EST 2004

J

M

A

How to Match the Sunglasses to the Ride

Features to look for in sunnies and goggles for your rides on gravel, trails and roads

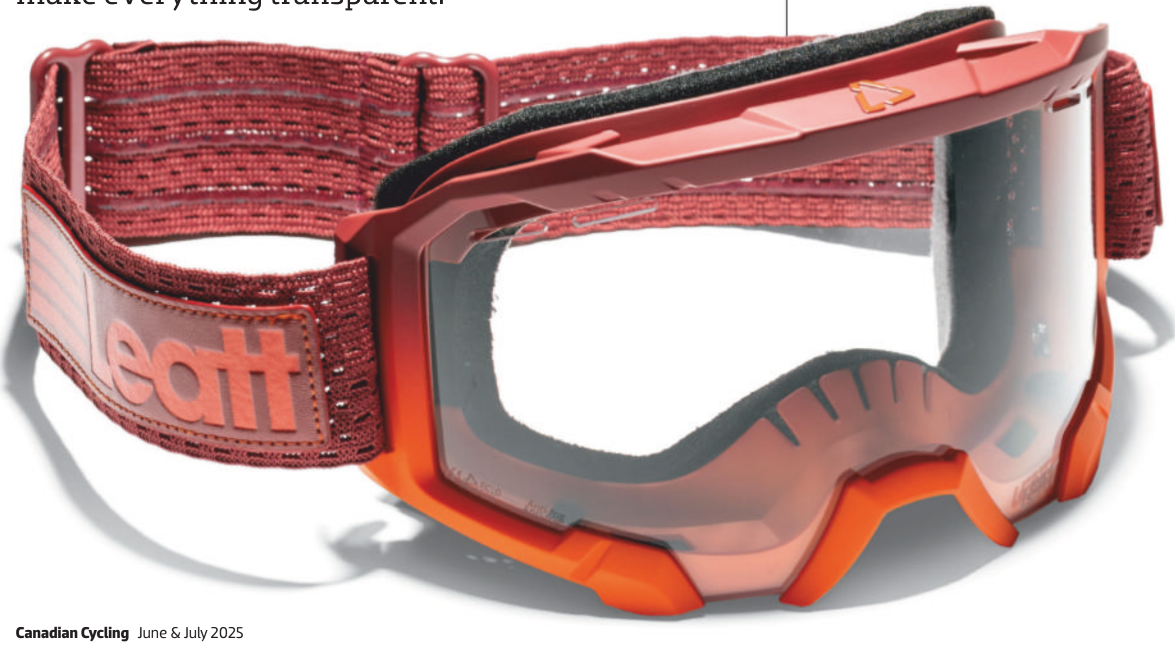
With dark sunglasses on one end and goggles on the other, there are a range of eye-protection options for every ride. While some choices are as clear as a Cat. 1 lens—strapping goggles on for a gravity run, for example—others are slightly more opaque. What should you wear for a gravel ride? Or a road ride? A look at the six pairs here should make everything transparent.

Best for gravel

The Shimano **Equinox** glasses ($175, *ridecanada.shimano.com*) A, which launched this past February, sit between the latest high-end S-Phyre SL glasses and the new Pulsar. What makes this set of Equinox suited for gravel riding is their lens. It's not just its transparent grey colour, but the company's Ridescape lens technology. In this case, it's Ridescape GR, a gravel-focused formulation that enhances contrast on the mix of surfaces you'll encounter. At 25.9 g, they're quite light. A clear lens also ships with the Equinox.

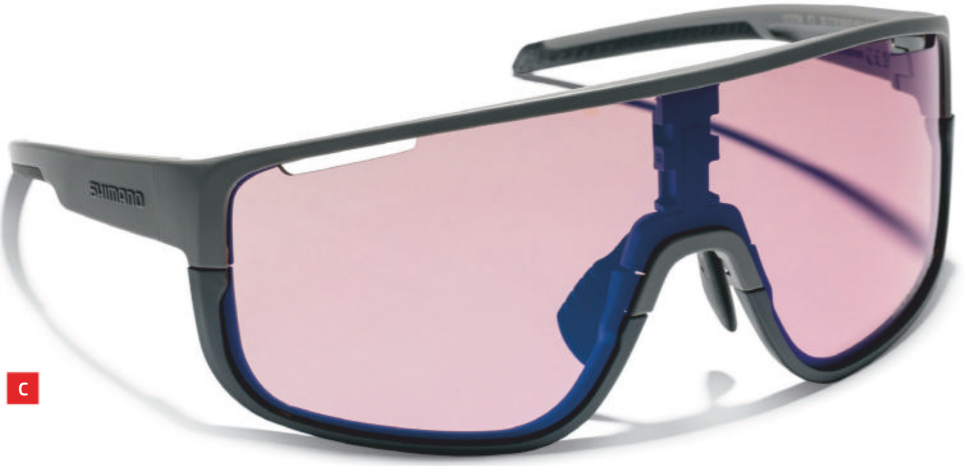
Best for trails

The Leatt **Velocity 4.0 MTB** goggles ($120, *mtb.leattcanada.ca*) B are feature-rich. See those gaps at the bottom part of the frame? Those are essentially dirt gutters that let crud drop away off the lens. On the inside is a built-in anti-fog treatment. Also, to keep condensation from accumulating, there are many vents covered with foam "screens" that only allow air in. The foam that rests against your face does an excellent job of not making its presence felt.



B

Photos: Matt Stetson



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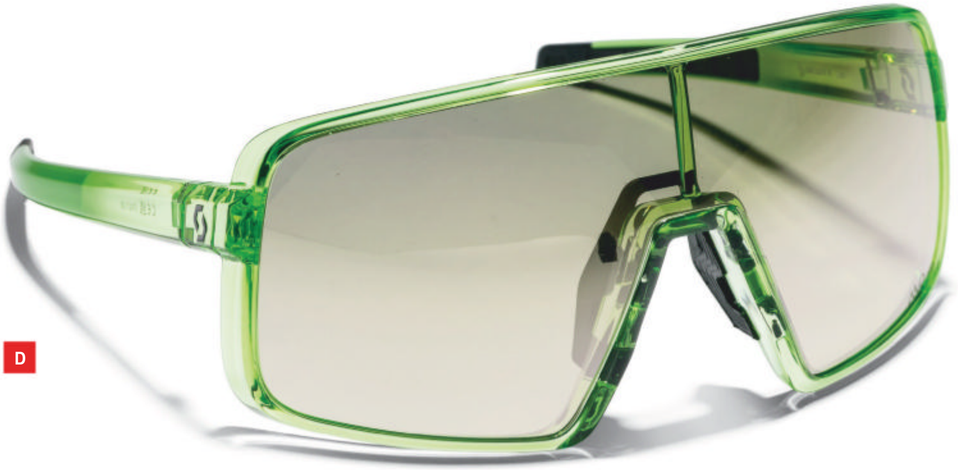

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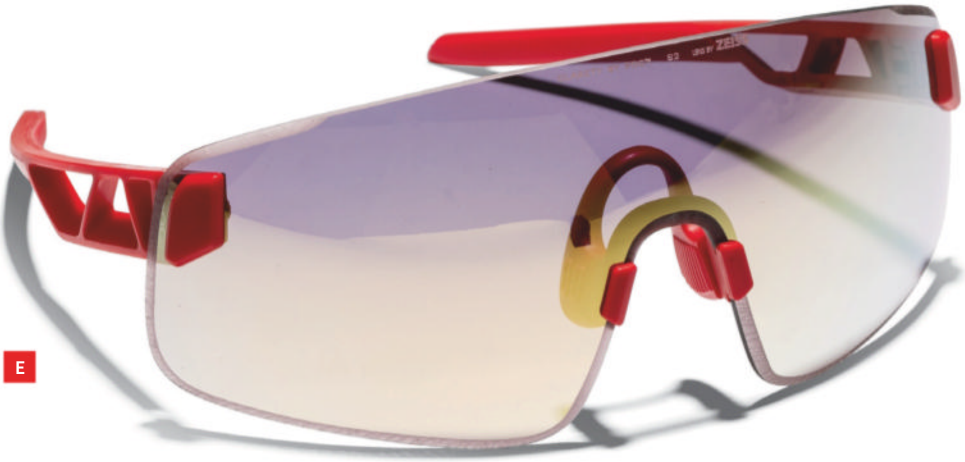

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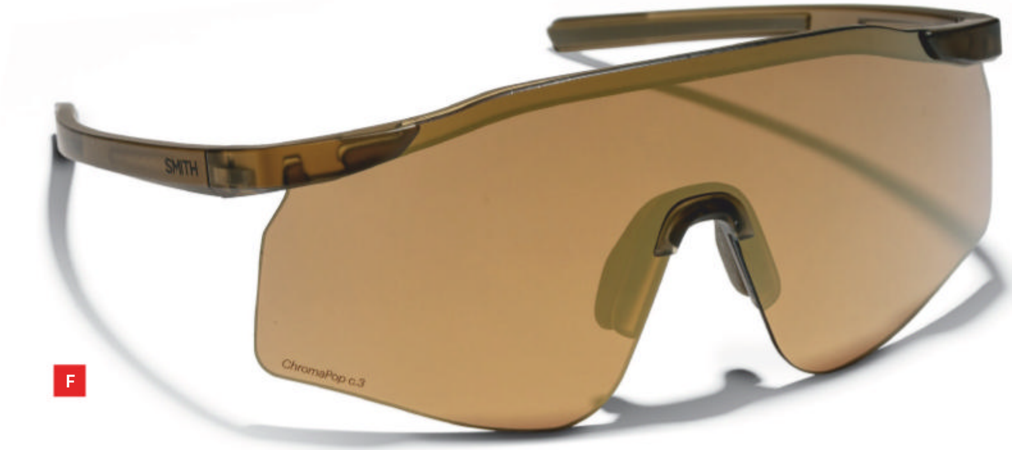

F

The new Shimano **Pulsar** glasses ($140, *ridecanada.shimano.com*) C sport a lens with the company's Ridescape technology for trails, enhancing what you see—rocks and roots—while riding singletrack. The Pulsar ships with a clear lens for overcast days or night rides. The frame has top and bottom sections. If you'd like to change up the look, simply remove the bottom portion.

Best for tarmac

While the Scott **Torica** glasses ($130, *scott-sports.com*) D sit in this road-focused section, the company is actually quite "discipline agnostic" about the sunnies. The frame has a fun and chunky look. This set uses a Cat. 2 lens, good for days with a mix of sun and clouds. From the outside, the temples seem to have small grippers at the ends, but the non-slip material actually runs a few centimetres toward the hinges in little recesses on the inward sides—an elegant design.

This set of POC **Elicit Toric** glasses ($350, *poc.com*) E come with a tint called prismane red, best for partly sunny conditions on the road. This model is also available with lenses designed for trails. Whichever pair is right for you, its temples are fabricated with renewable sources. According to POC, the temples' truss structure keeps the weight down. The parts are also designed to pop off in a crash, and then snap back into place afterwards. This Elicit Toric has a clear lens included in its case, as well as two additional nose pieces.

The Cat. 3 lens on Smith **Defy** glasses ($215, *smithoptics.com*) F has a visible light transmission rating of 14 per cent. It's what you want when the summer sun is high in the sky. Smith's definition-boosting technology is ChromaPop, which helps you to pick out features on the road better. The hinges let the temples snap into place nicely. It's easy to look pro putting on these sunnies one-handed.—*MP*

DESTINATION

KANSAS CITY

Barbecue, Beer and Jazz By Bike

The best way to experience this Midwestern city is on two wheels

by **Christina Palassio**

Cliff Drive in Kansas City, Mo., is where different versions and layers of history collide.

Some know Cliff Drive as an example of City Beautiful, an urban planning movement that emphasized wide boulevards, parks and public spaces. The breezy, tree-lined road winds along the limestone bluffs and wooded hills of North Terrace Park. On a quiet day, you can take the full lane and glide along overlooking the city and the Missouri River.

Others, like historian and guide Erik Stafford, know Cliff Drive and the surrounding neighbourhood as a place where Black residents were forced from their homes to make way for City Beautiful spaces, deepening economic, health and racial divides.

Cliff Drive is one of the many fascinating places I explored during three days of cycling in Kansas City in October 2024—before the trade war and aggression toward Canada began, making U.S. visits more complicated.

Kansas City is split across Missouri and Kansas. It's a hotbed of history. The city is the traditional territory of the Osage and Kansas Indigenous peoples. Lewis and Clark passed through on their way to the Pacific, as did thousands of pioneers heading west up the Missouri River. In 1864, the Civil War Battle of Westport was fought in what's now Swope Park, ending the Confederate Army's hopes of securing the state. In the 1920s, the city became a jazz hub thanks to locals Charlie "Bird" Parker and Count Basie. Kansas City is where Las Vegas mobsters counted the cash they pocketed at casinos, where city officials defied Prohibition orders and kept the bars open, and where the Negro Leagues baseball took root.

I knew little of this before arriving. To me, Kansas City was barbecue and the gateway to the Unbounded gravel race. I planned to attend a conference and figured I'd arrive early to explore some gravel. But the more I read about KCMO, as the Missouri side is known, the more I realized that the place to explore is the city itself.

I arrived and picked up a RideKC ebike in front of Union Station, the city's Beaux-Arts train station. I expected KCMO to be flat, but found the topography quite hilly.

MoBikeFed, Missouri's cycling organization, lists dozens of mapped road and gravel routes on its website. Executive director Brent Hugh pointed me to the KCRI-09 route, which hits several of the city's iconic stops. I used the route to plan an arts loop on Day 1 and a history loop on Day 2. On Day 3, I joined a Civic Bike Ride led by Erik Stafford and the Major Taylor Cycling Club.

While Hugh and I were talking, I asked him what it's like to bike outside the city. Ideally, any trip to the area would combine both in-city and rural riding. "If you're used to driving the freeway you'd think, man, this is the ugliest place I've ever lived," he said. "But turn off that

Photos: Courtesy Visit KC

road and ride 10 miles and you find these rolling hills, farm houses every mile and a landscape that looks much like it did in 1850. There's a vast Midwestern rolling-hills landscape that you can explore infinitely on gravel." The MoBikeFed website is an excellent resource for multi-day bikepacking route ideas, many of which use the Katy Trail that runs from St. Louis to almost Kansas.

But back to the city exploration: from Union Station, I looped south on Gilham Road's bidirectional protected bike lane to the Kemper Contemporary Art Museum, home to one of sculptor Louise Bourgeois's iconic Maman spider sculptures, and then on to the sprawling Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, fronted by 2,500-kg shuttlecocks. You could spend a week exploring the museum's 42,000 artworks but, facing a growing hankering for barbecue, I made the tour quick.

They say KCMO is the city of fountains, but what I saw were tons of massive murals—of rhinoceroses on bikes, puffins, the Chiefs. "You'll see so much more of the city on two wheels than if you're driving a car—the smells of the barbecue, the sites of the murals," says Michael Kelly, director of policy with BikeWalkKC, an advocacy organization. "Kansas City is not a place without challenges, but it is a place that is full of a lot of heart and one of the best ways that you can really experience that is on two wheels."

He was right. I smelled Arthur Bryant's Barbeque's spicy-sweet molasses and burnt ends a block

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BARBEQUE
Arthur Bryant's
Barbeque

OPPOSITE TOP
Kansas City skyline with Union Station in the fore

BOTTOM
RideKC Bike city bikes in use downtown

ABOVE
Arthur Bryant's Barbeque

"You find these rolling hills, farm houses every mile and a landscape that looks much like it did in 1850. There's a vast Midwestern rolling-hills landscape that you can explore infinitely on gravel."

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before I rolled up. After a tasty brisket sandwich, I biked over to the East Crossroads District and Brewer's Alley to meet up with cycling advocate Ellen Schwartze, who founded the KC Family Bike Ride. The ride goes along the Trolley Track Trail, a 10-km trail that runs south from the city through the residential neighbourhood of Brookside. Schwartze is one of many advocates who are building an inclusive and safe cycling culture.

I found it fairly easy to get to most spots in the city via a bike lane, and car traffic on many streets was light. The bike traffic wasn't that heavy either for that matter—while the city boasts lots of cycling clubs and weekly rides, I only saw a few commuting cyclists throughout three days and 100 km.

I rode into the 18th and Vine neighbourhood, the heart of the city's historic jazz scene, on the bidirectional bike lane on 19th Avenue, to visit the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, which documents the rise of the historic Black baseball league and the beloved Kansas City Monarchs. Next door is the American Jazz Museum, which shows how Charlie Parker and other musicians built the city's music scene, and Bird's memorial nearby.

Then I hopped onto Grand Boulevard and headed north toward the Missouri River, the City Market and the Arabia Steamboat Museum, which tells the fascinating story of how the waterway influenced the development of the city and the American West. The museum houses artifacts and parts of the steamboat that were excavated from an aquifer more than a 100 years after the watercraft ran aground. Hundreds of boats are buried at the bottom of the river—another example of the layers of history here.

KCMO may not be the most beautiful city. Its cycling infrastructure and culture are still coming into their own. But if you like riding for depth as much as for distance, it's a fascinating destination with a ton to offer.

Photos: Courtesy Visit KC

OPPOSITE LEFT TOP
Country Club Plaza and the mermaid fountain

OPPOSITE LEFT CENTRE
The KC Wheel

OPPOSITE BOTTOM
Boulevard Brewing Co.

OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT
Cycling at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts

LEFT
U.S. National WWI Museum and Memorial

Kansas City
St. Louis

Details

How to get there
Air Canada has regular direct flights from Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver.

Where to stay
Choose from an assortment of chain hotels in the Crossroads and Power and Light Districts.

Biking options
Check out Velo Garage and Tap House (*velogaragekc.com*) for bikes, beers and a fun atmosphere. For bike rentals, the best option I could find was The Bike Shack (*bicycleshack.com*). If you're going to ride in the city, you can rent RideKC Bike (*ridekcbike.com*) city bikes by the hour or by the day through an app. Cycling Kansas City (*cyclingkc.org*) keeps an up-to-date calendar of local group rides on its website. For ideas beyond the city, the MoBikeFed is an excellent resource (*mobikefed.org*).

Where to eat and drink
For barbecue, try Arthur Bryant's (*arthurbryantsbbq.com*), Slap's BBQ (*slapsbbqkc.com*), Gates Bar-B-Q (*gatesbbq.com*), and Q39 (*q39kc.com*). Breweries include BKS Artisan Ales in Brookside (*bksartisanales.com*). Brewery Emperial (*breweryemperial.com*), Boulevard Brewing (*boulevard.com*) and Casual Animal. (*casualanimalbrewing.com*).

What to do off the bike
There's so much to see in KCMO, all within a fairly narrow area. For jazz, there's the the Green Lady Lounge or the 18th and Vine neighbourhood. For museums and memorials, see the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, the American Jazz Museum, the Arabia Steamboat Museum and the WWI Memorial. The Moshe Safdie–designed Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts offers concerts throughout the year. Sports fans can catch a Chiefs or Royals game, or bike out to the Kansas City Current's stadium, the only purpose-built stadium for women's sports in North America, to catch a soccer game.

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IT'S ALL ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE

Q&A

Emilly Johnston

Cross country world championship podium finisher moves up to elite on her dream team

by **Matthew Pioro**

When I spoke with elite cross country rider Emilly Johnson this past March, it was just a few days before she won the Argentario race, part of the Internazionali d'Italia Series. The success added to her win in South Africa earlier in the year at the Western Cape XCO Cup 1. In April, she faced a setback. A crash in the first XCO race at the Araxá, Brazil World Cup left her with no broken bones, but with nasty scrapes and some concern about a concussion. She was cleared for racing by the next XCO event in Araxá.

During our conversation, we discussed her two lives, her European one and her Vancouver Island one, her plans for the year and doing cool tricks at the 2024 under-23 XCO world championship race where she finished third.

I understand that during the 2024 under-23 cross country world championship race, you got a little bit rad. You did a trick. What was that trick and how did it come about?

The day before the race, one of my best friends on the circuit, Tamara Wiedmann—who was also on Trek Future Racing—and I made the agreement that if we came around together at this one jump, we would do a train. I would do a t-bog, and she would do a tire grab. So I did a t-bog in the middle of the cross country race at worlds. And I have to say, I think it gave me 10 extra watts for the rest of the race because it was so fun.

Last year was your final season as an under-23 rider and on Trek Future Racing. You landed on Scott-SRAM racing for 2025. How did that come about?

Honestly, this 2025 season was pretty uncertain right up until worlds last year. I was chatting with a couple teams, but I didn't really know what was going to happen. I actually ended up signing with Scott-SRAM Racing the Wednesday before the short track at worlds. It took a lot of stress off the shoulders.

STATS

Hometown	Comox, B.C.
Born	April 29, 2002
Team	Scott-SRAM MTB Racing
Teammates	Nino Schurter, Filippo Colombo, Andri Frischknecht, Bjorn Riley
Influences	Mical Dyck, Sina Frei, Catharine Pendrel, Sam Whittingham
Bikes	Scott Spark RC cross country, Scott Ransom RC enduro, Scott Addict RC road

I still pinch myself because I'm here with the dream team in my first year elite, just trying to do my best at the thing I love the most in the world. I'm just so beyond grateful to be able to say that.

Did you approach Scott-SRAM or did they contact you regarding the season ahead?

They ended up contacting me actually, at the beginning of August.

That's kind of flattering.

Yeah, it was super cool. I got a call out of the blue, and then it all happened quite quickly, so it was really incredible.

You're quite connected with your home community in the Comox Valley. Yet, you've lived in Switzerland, Austria and spent a lot of time in Spain recently. Much of your development as a rider has been in Europe. Why was the European route the right one for you?

From a career-development perspective, it's easier to get a higher level of racing and training in Europe without having to travel as much than it is in North America.

I really love being at home. I also really love it in Europe. Every season I spend in Europe, the more comfortable I get, and the more I feel like I'm able to find my place.

I was honestly just thinking about it the other day. It feels like I live two lives. There's my European life, where I like to live in cities and do city things, and just experience a different part of life. Then, I can go home and be in nature completely. I don't want to be in a city at home. I just want to be out in the woods, riding or hiking or fishing or just being in the mountains. Whereas in Europe, the culture and history is just so incredible. So I can learn from both and get to experience a lot of different things.

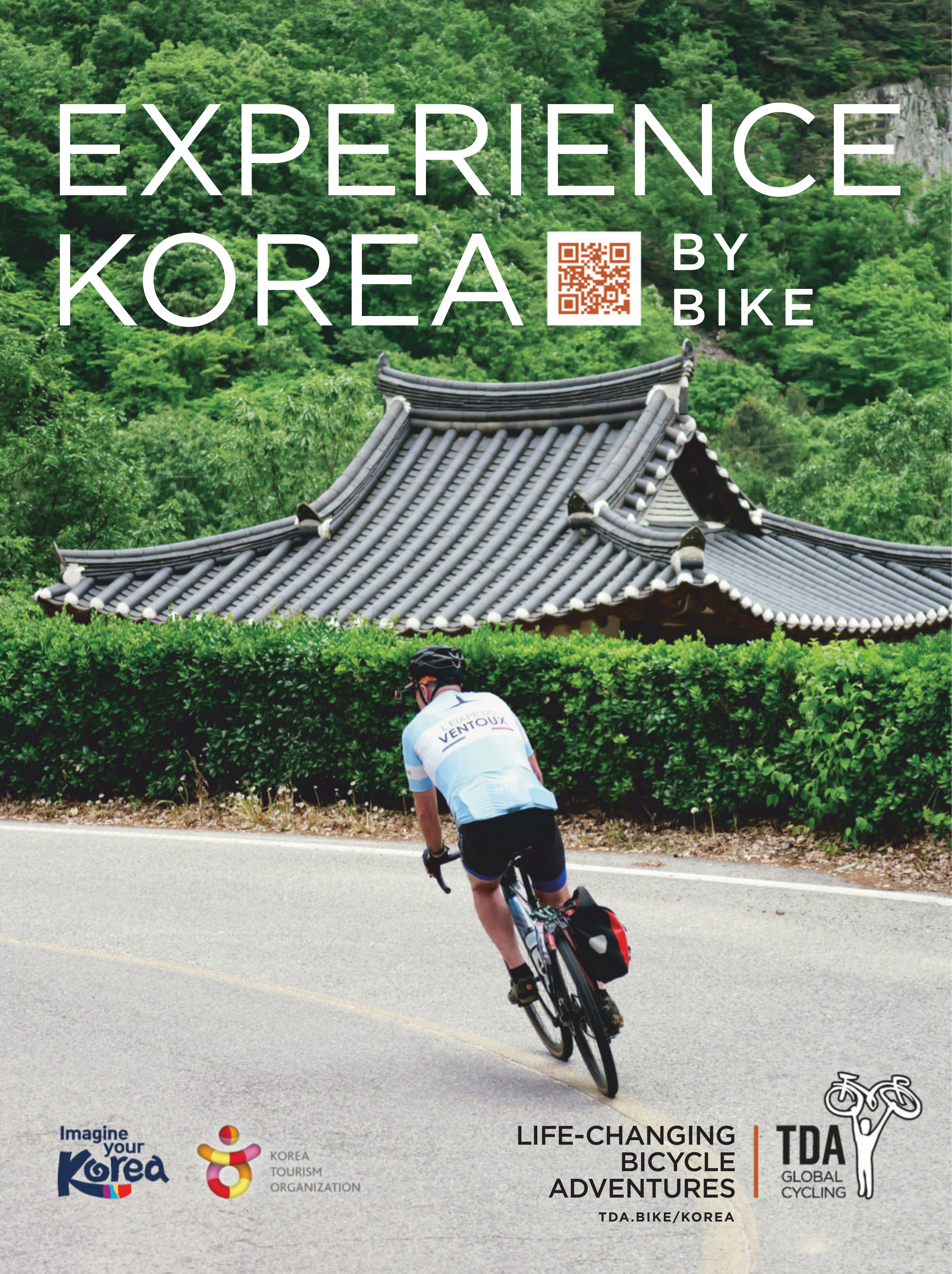
What is ahead for you this season?

For me, the main goal will be all the World Cups and a few Swiss Cups. Of course, I'm really looking forward to having nationals on the Island this season. It's going to be a blast.

That's right. It's in Victoria, like, right down the street from your home.

Yeah, the closest I've ever had nationals, so it's going to be good.

Photo: Piper Albrecht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